This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

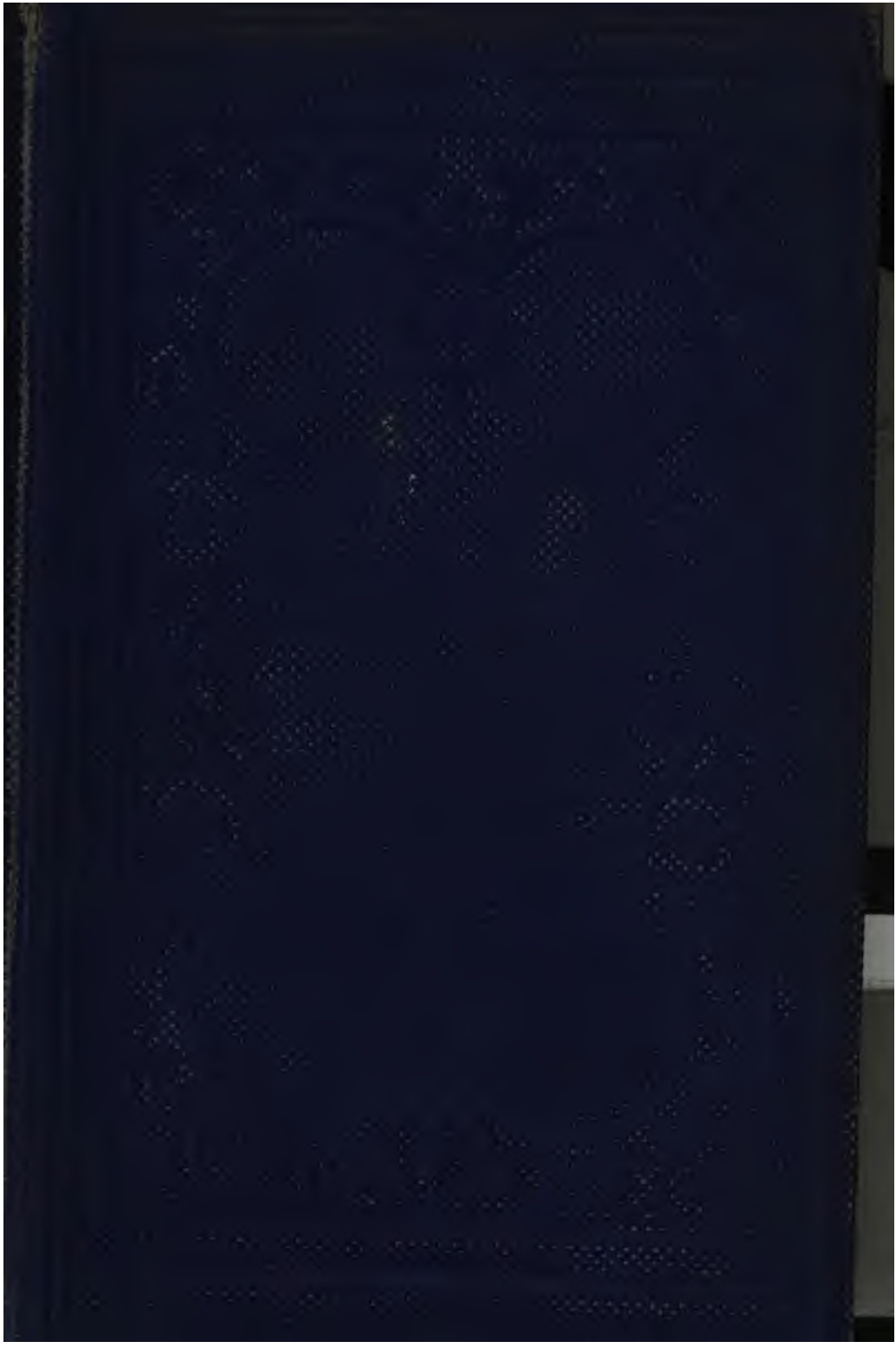
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`



600078269

THE SILVER CORD:

A Story.

BY

SHIRLEY BROOKS,

AUTHOR OF "ASPEN COURT," "THE GORDIAN KNOT," ETC.

"A swarm of fire-flies, tangled in a silver braid."

TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

BRADBURY & EVANS, 11, BOUVERIE STREET.

1861.

[*The right of translation is reserved.*]

250 f 50

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

TO HIS WIFE,

This Book

IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

A PREFACE is sometimes judged unfairly, simply because the reader forgets that it is not a preface. The author, at all events, composes it at the close of his labours. The least vain among us, when he has covered some thousand pages with print, believes that he has done a Thing. According to his nature, he intones a solemn *Nunc opus*, or affects a careless exultation. To the preface, in which he has signified his idea of his finished work, cometh the reader, fresh and curious, and is probably displeased at the outset with that of which he might be reasonably tolerant at the close. Hence such preliminary is, for the most part, best omitted.

Yet it is pleasant to say a few egotistic words to known and unknown friends, especially when one is presenting, in a new form, a book which has been laid before them, fragmentarily, during a period of ten months, and which has brought to the author a great number of communications, of which it would seem almost discourteous not to take the only notice in his power.

Constructed with a view to what the author regarded as the special exigence of the periodical for which it was written, this work was not designed as a series of elaborate sketches of moral scenery, with moving figures. It was not put together as a scaffold, to uphold a purpose. It was not to be an art-novel. Of each of these forms of fiction, and of several others, equally apart from the design of this book, the author has, he trusts, all due appreciation, and for their exhibition by the masters of the imaginative craft (happily numerous, foolishly as the age is said to lack poets) he has the warmest admiration. But for the periodical in which the "Silver Cord" was to appear, it seemed to the author that what was wanted was a Story.

It is a Story, therefore, which he has endeavoured to write. And also keeping in view the requirements of the periodical publication, he determined to adopt a form which, but a few weeks ago, he observed to be recommended, in a valuable criticism, as an experiment for a novelist. He resolved to omit, as far as possible, Description, physical as well as moral, and to tell his story by means of Action and of Dialogue. It may be as well to add, however, that upon this ground he rests no claim to originality, as several of the most effective novels in French literature are constructed under the same conditions, and the writers have had to bear, as best they might, the charge of

being mere *Raconteurs*. This charge has found its echo in England—a land of echoes—upon divers occasions when our own novelists have strangely forgotten that they are, *ex officio*, theologians, politicians, reformers, and missionaries.

In reply to various correspondents who have from time to time impressed upon him the absolute necessity of reconciling two persons separated by the events of the story, the author can only express his gratification at finding that so much interest has been excited by the estrangement of that couple. If he has not availed himself of any of the various expedients that have been tendered to him as means for bringing about the re-union, he must pray his kind advisers to believe that it is not always permitted to depart from a pre-arranged scheme. Specially, to the somewhat remorseless friends who have affectionately urged upon him to "kill one of the children," in order to reconcile its parents across its tomb, he would say that Herod has of late been almost too rampant among the children of novels to justify the repetition of the expedient. A great Master set the example, and did it so exquisitely that his inimitable workmanship should have warned off parodists, but a Massacre of the Innocents set in, and happy is the novel reader who gets through a second volume without weeping over a slain child. For weep we all must—the fountain is ready to the clumsiest

hand, and flows, however coarsely the little soul is dismissed. *Connu.* Friends at a distance will please accept this intimation that they could not be invited to a child-funeral.

To the sterner and more practical correspondents who have demanded to know how a gentleman in a public office managed to stay away so long without forfeiting his situation, I must answer as the French critic does, when driven into a corner upon the question as to what personal attractions Penelope could have had for Ulysses, after all those years of his rambles, "that it would be well if persons would attend to their own family business, and believe that heroes know what they are about."

Finally, let me say, that, very gratifying to me as is the great favour with which the tale, in its issue by instalments, has been received, this fact does not render me inclined to estimate less seriously than heretofore the many objections to this mode of publication; and I may be permitted to add my hope, that, should I again offer to the public a work of fiction, it will be in the form in which I now publish the Silver Cord.

S. B.

THE TEMPLE,
September 1st, 1861.

THE SILVER CORD.

CHAPTER I.

"FOUR," remarked St. Mary of the Strand, successor to the tall Maypole that once overlooked what is now the pleasantest, and handsomest, and most English street in London.

The vibration of the Saint's voice had by no means ceased from out of the ears of the passers-by, when, with an honourable promptitude, and a delicate anxiety not to put the country under the obligation of receiving more service than she had bargained for, groups of gentlemen of all ages and sizes came pouring out at the gate of Somerset House. One might have thought that they had been listening for the summons, and had prepared themselves to obey it on the instant. In the old days, that church did not collect the saints of Drury Lane so rapidly as it now called forth the clerks of the Civil Service.

But not among the early ones at the gate was Mr. Arthur Lygon.

He heard the last stroke of the bell, and the single note with which the little black clock on his mantelpiece ratified the announcement, before he closed the

large volume in which he was making entries from some half-printed, half-written papers by his side; and he proceeded to arrange all his documents with the precision of a man who intends to resume an interrupted duty, and who knows the value of order and of time. He was exact, but not the least fidgetty —a man, happily married, seldom becomes a fidget at five-and-thirty.

Nor did Arthur Lygon at once take up his hat and depart. A handsome man, happily married, seldom loses, at the age of thirty-five, his bachelor habit of paying some attention to appearances; and Mr. Lygon went to the other end of his comfortable, double-sashed apartment — exclusively his own — brushed his wavy dark brown hair, washed his aristocratic hands, and gave himself that good-natured look-over which a man who has no objectionable vanity, but has the laudable desire to be as presentable as he conveniently can, usually performs before re-joining society. King Henry the Fifth, when courting, vowed that he had never looked in the glass for the love of anything he saw there; and the vows of kings — and emperors — are always truthful; but all of us have not the regal faculty of self-abnegation. Arthur Lygon, finishing his arrangements with a touch at his rather effective brown whiskers, saw, and was perfectly content to see in the glass the reflection of a set of intellectual features, somewhat of the Grecian type, but manifesting much power of decision, despite the good-tempered expression which they habitually wore.

He perceived also that the person thus reflected was rather slight, but well made, and a little above the average height, and that his dress was in accordance with the fashion of the day, with a little more lightness and colour about it than one usually sees in the costume of a man of business. Lygon was a good-looking, well-dressed man, and if he had been previously unaware of the fact, he had been told it, with other things of a pleasant character, in one of a highly complimentary series of sketches called *Our Civilians*, which were appearing in a pictorial paper devoted to the immortalising British Worthies of various degrees of worthiness.

In the memoir annexed to the likeness of the civilian in question it was stated, with perfect accuracy, that Mr. Arthur Lygon had entered the Plaudit Office when young, had risen, by his own merits, to a responsible and lucrative situation, was much liked by his comrades, and much respected by his superiors, and was in every respect a valuable public servant. It was further stated, in classical language, that he had given hostages to society, a process that was explained to mean that he had married Laura, third daughter of Archibald Vernon, of Lipthwaite, in the county of Surrey, and had three children. Society, therefore, had only to purchase the respectable journal containing the sketches of *Our Civilians*, in order to avoid betraying any ignorance upon so important a matter as the social position of Mr. Arthur Lygon, of the Plaudit Office; and if it were in his destiny to distinguish himself in after-time,

and to join the legislative assembly of his country, here were materials ready at hand for the Parliamentary Handbooks—one is glad to be able to supply some vindication of the biographical zeal of the present age.

Arthur Lygon, before leaving his room, tore away from the Almanac the one-day face that stared in his own, and he thus treated the day as at an end. This operation left next day's date visible, and it was Thursday, June 17, 185—.

Of this date, however, there was no need to remind him, as a neat square packet on his table testified. The Thursday was the birthday of his little girl, Clara, and the packet contained a handsome picture-book, which he had bought for her some days back, and which had just come to him with the small lady's name elegantly imprinted thereon in golden letters. Lygon did not leave even trifles to the last minute, and moreover did not consider it a trifle to bring out an additional sparkle in his child's eye, or a second scream of pleasure from her merry rosy mouth.

He walked westward, and having nearly a couple of hours between the time and his dinner hour, he had ample leisure to make the walk to Brompton an agreeable lounge. And the man who cannot lounge in comfort and delectation along the Strand on a fine day is simply a fool. If that eternal New Zealander can spare time from his ridiculous efforts to keep his own and his father's land from the landjobbers, and will come over here before the arch is

ruined and ready for him, he may be really well educated by a few walks up and down our great thoroughfare. "To have loved her was a liberal education," was exquisitely written of a lady of old. If a tolerably practical *curriculum*, with a dash of sentiment and poetry in it, were wanted, it might be difficult to prescribe better than in the words "Walk the Strand."

Lygon, of course, walked it as an *habitué* walks. He noted some new machine, approved it as useful, or smiled at it as a bit of quackery. He glanced over the Parian sculptures and the painted plates, and very properly remembered that he owed Laura a present—which he would continue to owe her. He stopped for a moment before the maps, and refreshed his memory as to the distance from Calcutta to Canton—there was talk about China, just then, at the dinner-tables. He looked at the jewellery, and wondered how such a number of jewel shops could find customers enough, and also whether there would ever be any new patterns worth stopping to look at. He not only paused at the book-shops; but, half-adhering to the old faith that you may buy bargains there, and that the vendors do not know the value of books better than you do, he examined a good many of the labels with the usual result; namely, confirmation of the new faith, that if you want a good thing you must pay a good price for it. He regarded the windows set out with minerals, and felt half tempted to torment his second boy, Frederick, with a toy that is warranted

to teach geology in a week; but fatherly feeling prevailed, and he passed on. He scarcely looked at some huge play-bills, because they had not been changed for two months, and Laura had seen and duly shuddered at the *Maelstrom*, and the screams as the ship went down, in that awful drama. He noticed all the print-shops, and resisted all the temptations that worn plates and cheap frames could offer, as well as the less easily resisted temptation of some German engravings of the higher class—for the Strand baits for all fish. And except that he bought a little gold pencil-case, to be given to Clara by her mamma, on the morrow, and recollected Walter's request for a new knife, Mr. Lygon reached Trafalgar Square without much detriment to his worldly means.

"Only half-past five," he said, as he reached his own pleasant house in Gurdon Terrace.

Walter, a high-spirited, dark-eyed boy, of ten years old, heard his father's latch-key, and was in a moment tearing down the stairs with that cataract rush peculiar to the species.

"Ah! papa," he cried, throwing his arms round Mr. Lygon's neck. "Got my knife?" he added, proceeding almost in the same breath from affection to business.

"Knife?" repeated his father, pretending to be unconscious of the boy's meaning. "Knife, my boy?"

"Yes, knife, my boy," returned Walter, for when was a child deceived by a loving voice? "You've got it, you know you have."

"Well, whether I have got it or not, you might let me come into the room," said his father, entering a little apartment on the left of the hall. The room was conventionally described in the house as "papa's," and as matter of course, therefore, crowded with everybody else's litter, and where papa could seldom find anything of his.

"I wish I might have one seat in my own room," said Mr. Lygon, affecting to grumble, and sweeping the pieces of a dissected puzzle of Joseph and his Brethren from the chair that seemed least choked up. "I told you, Master Walter, to see that the puzzle was put back into the box when done with."

"Well, it's Fred's fault, papa," replied Walter, of course.

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Lygon, seating himself.

He was going to make Walter pick up the pieces, before entering into further discussion, but the boy's eager look at the waistcoat-pocket in which he supposed his new treasure to be, was almost affecting, and his father could not be hard-hearted.

"Now, about this knife," he began gravely; but the boy's arm was round Mr. Lygon's neck in a moment.

"Yes, about the knife—out with it, papa."

"Just you please to stay a moment, Master Walter. This makes the fifth knife since Christmas, and that won't do."

"No, pa, only the fourth."

"Fifth, I tell you. There was the nice buckhorn one that your uncle Charles gave you."

"Nice one! Pretty niceness! Why, I broke it the very same afternoon."

"And whose fault was that—your uncle's?"

"Yes, it was. He ought to have given me a stronger one. Why, didn't you tell me I ought to make a boat, and didn't the blade fly away as I was cutting one?"

"I did not tell you to cut boats with a penknife. But I remember I then bought you a beauty, white handle and three blades, sir."

"Yes, that *was* a beauty. I hope you've bought me another like it."

"Indeed, no. But where did that go to?"

"Well, there was a hole in my pocket, and I suppose it went through that."

"Your mamma gave you another."

"Oh, a girl's thing! little bits of blades no bigger than that," showing a thumb-nail that might have been cleaner. "I gave it to Lizzie Park, the day we went on the water, and she gave me a gimblet for good luck."

"And where did the young lady get a gimblet, pray?"

"Out of her papa's box of tools, I suppose. I've got it in my pocket now."

"Then please to take it out of your pocket, and put it in a proper place. Now, Master Walter, about number four? Did you not take my own desk knife, from this very inkstand?"

"Oh, ah!" returned Walter, convicted but not convinced. "I don't call *that* a knife."

"What do you call it—a fork?"

"No," said Walter, with one of those spirts of laughter that reward you for saying something utterly ridiculous to a child. "But you can't call that a knife—it don't shut."

It was now his father's turn to laugh, and to hand over the brown Wharncliffe he had brought down. Walter was more than delighted—all the advantages of the beautiful lost white knife, with the manly character of the brown handle—perfect. He gave his father a violent hug, and a kiss which, hastily directed anywhere, fell on the parent's ear, and then the boy dashed off, proclaiming that he must show his prize to mamma.

"Mamma is dressing for dinner," his father cried after him. "She don't want you."

"Oh, she always wants me," was the answering shout, as Walter tore up the stairs three at a time.

Mr. Lygon looked into the dining-room. The table was laid for three, as usual—for himself and Mrs. Lygon, and for Miss Clara, who was permitted to complete the party, though an early dinner with her school-boy brothers, Walter and Fred, made her attendance almost honorary. But papa liked to see his little lady at the dinner-table, and Mrs. Lygon had a curious and unfeminine habit of complying with all his whims.

His wife's portrait, a rather large oil-painting, hung over the mantelpiece, and his eye caught a card put between the painting and the frame.

"I wonder who did *that*," said Mr. Lygon, dis-

content. "I have said a dozen times that I will not have things stuck there." And he took out the offensive card, and looked at it.

"'Mr. Ernest Adair,'" he read. "I don't know the name, do I? Ernest Adair—no—I've heard of Robin, but Laura knows, I suppose." And as the making even so slight an alteration as the removing a card from a picture will often cause you to look earnestly at the work itself, though it has hung before you for years, Arthur Lygon paused for a moment or two and gazed on the likeness of his wife.

A beautiful face, with a mass of dark hair in clustered curls,—a forehead lower than painters care to draw, except those painters who comprehend that the best type of womanhood is not found with the traditional high brow,—an expression of stillness, perhaps verging on sternness, and something that spoke of troubles confronted, perhaps of sufferings endured. And yet the face was loveable, and the violet eyes were tender. For the rest, a delicate throat, a white full shoulder, and rounded and graceful arms. The figure was seated, and in one of the faultless hands—almost too small—was a rosary of golden beads.

"She is handsomer now than she was then," said the husband, with a determined expression, as if of defiance to all who might doubt whether the mother of three children could excel in beauty a lovely-looking girl of nineteen.

"She is, though," he added, with an affirmation

which, as there was a happy smile on his lips, and a world of affection in his heart, was not, let us hope, laid to his charge. "In the first place, she is happier, and—"

He left the room, and the next minute his little Clara bounded into his arms, if not with as much energy as her brothers, with quite as much delight, and as her luxuriant hair, dark as her mother's, shaded his face, she murmured her words of fondness.

"Dear, dear papa," she said, kissing him over and over again.

And no sooner was she dismissed, than there was another scene of love, on the next landing, where Frederick was lying in wait for his father, and pounced upon him with boisterous affection. It is a monotonous story, but a happy one.

"Been to school in those splendid clothes, Fred?"

"Half-holiday, Wednesday, papa."

"Ah, so it is. And where have you been? To the Zoological Gardens?"

"No, we *were* going there with mamma, but a gentleman came, and so mamma was obliged to send us out for a walk by ourselves; me and Clara."

"Who was that, Fred?"

"I don't know him. I saw him just for a minute. He was an ugly-looking fellow."

"Hush, sir, you mustn't call names, and, above all, never use them to people who come to see us, because that is worse than rude, it's unkind. I suppose you thought him ugly because he kept you from going to the beasts?"

"Well, you take us on Sunday?" said Fred, declining the discussion.

"We'll hear what mamma says," replied Mr. Lygon, going to his dressing-room.

When he came out again, he gave a rap at the bed-room door as he passed, and crying, "Six, mother," descended to the drawing-room, where he found Walter, who was breathing on his new blades, watching the breath-damp evaporate, and tenderly wiping the steel with the corner of a table-cover. He had conscience enough, however, to feel that this last proceeding was exceptionable, and with one of those irresistibly sly looks which disarm remonstrance, he pocketed the knife, and began to hang on to his father's well-knit arm, and raise himself from the ground by his hands.

"There, my boy, a little of that will do on a hot day," said Mr. Lygon, laughingly swinging him away. "What did mamma say to the present?"

"She didn't call me to come in, so I couldn't show it her."

"And how is Eutropius?"

"Oh, he's very well, thank you," said Walter; "and so's Numa Pompilius who was very bilious, and Ancus Martius who wore moustachios, and all the rest of 'em. Shall I tell mamma to come down?" he added, as if not particularly anxious to undergo a classical examination.

"If you like."

In a quarter of a minute he was knocking very loudly at the bed-room door. Apparently the sum-

mons was without effect, for it was repeated with additional pertinacity.

"Mamma won't answer me," said Walter, coming back to the room rather discomfited.

"Have you been doing anything rude, or wrong?" said Mr. Lygon.

"No, indeed, papa," said Walter, whose face was truthfulness itself. "We had quite a game, me and ma, when I came in from school, racing round the dining-room table, and kissing one another."

"Can she be unwell?" said Mr. Lygon, running up-stairs.

No answer was given to his knock, or voice, and he tried the door. It was not fastened, and he partly opened it and spoke again. No answer, and he entered. No wife was there.

"Why, she must have gone down-stairs, Walter, before I came from my room," said the father, laughing at the boy, who had followed him up-stairs.

Walter did not laugh in return. He looked grave for a moment, and then dashed down-stairs with even greater celerity, if possible, than was his wont. It did not take that earnest searcher many seconds to fly into every room in the lower part of the house, and he returned to his father, who was adjusting some prints on the bed-room walls.

"Mamma's not down-stairs."

Is there any sort of instinct which warns a loving creature of a sorrow at hand—a sorrow in which the dearly loved one is implicated?

"Look up-stairs," said his father promptly, and noticing a sudden pallor on the child's face.

Walter sprang away on the instant; but before he was on the topmost stair his father held in his hand the key of the mystery. Lygon's eye had fallen on an ivory box on a small table. The box was open, and a letter addressed to himself was placed upright in it, placed as with intention that his notice should be attracted by the paper.

His wife had written the direction, but the note he took from the envelope was not in the graceful though irregular hand he loved so well. It was a man's writing.

But he opened the note calmly enough—why should he not have done so?—we do not live in a world of melodrama, and a married lady living at Brompton may be suddenly called away from her home without any necessity for her husband's being alarmed. Her sister has been taken ill, and the doctor has sent a hasty line of summons, or Mr. Vernon—

But it is *not* her father's small writing—it is a stranger's hand.

"*Laura Vernon has no choice, and must obey the call which removes her. All pursuit or inquiry will be in vain. But silence may be rewarded.*"

That was all. And the last five words were written in a hurried hand, and as if unwillingly, and were blotted, as if they had been added at the last moment.

"Laura Vernon."

Arthur Lygon's heart had long since ceased to throb at the sight or sound of that name. From the day when an agitated bride had exchanged it for another, and he had clasped her to that heart in the earnestness of as true a love as a woman may desire, the girl-name's power of magic had been surrendered to another word of charming. To read the old word, and in a stranger's writing, and as the opening of that strange message, was a thing to do in the wild yet calm madness of a dream, but there—there—in the bedroom of the house, with all the common-place comfort of an orderly household around him, the very summons to dinner about to be given, the children—

"She is not up-stairs, papa."

"Mamma has gone out," said Mr. Lygon, as calmly as he had ever spoken. "Go down-stairs, Walter, and stay with Clara and Frederick until I come down."

He closed and locked the door.

In life, it were base to take advantage of one who is suddenly roused from sleep. Let the same generosity be observed in telling his story; and while a kind, good, happy man awakens from his happiness, it may be to remain neither good nor kind, let us turn away, in decent humanity, and leave him, unwatched, to shudder into comprehension of what has come to him—come to him on the day which, but three hours ago, he treated as ended. Let us leave him to his waking.

CHAPTER II.

To the simple question, "How far is Lipthwaite from the railway-station?" the reply, "That depends upon circumstances," would seem to savour of the simplicity for which a less gentle name might be found by practical or impatient inquirers. Consigning these to the mystifications of the respected Quaker, whose monthly Quadrilateral is so efficient a defence of our towns and cities against invasion by the traveller, we will presently vindicate a reply which appears to be no answer.

The people of Lipthwaite were always rather proud of their clean, cheerful little town, but their pride received an accession which became almost dangerous, when their new and beautiful neighbour, Lady Charrington, on her return from her wedding tour in Scotland, declared to Sir Frederick, as he was showing her about the little borough of which she was to become the friend, patroness, and star, that Lipthwaite reminded her of Edinburgh. Sir Frederick was still in that honeymoonlight which silvers everything for a happy and admiring young husband, yet his astonishment at this speech made him pull the ponies in with such a jerk that they nearly backed the basket-chair into the shop of the chief bookseller, round which two or three gentle-

men were lounging—they lounged a good deal at Lipthwaite.

One of the group, a tall, elderly, black-frock-coated gentleman, with a shrewd but still a kindly expression on his well-marked face, and with some humour in his smile, stepped forward to offer assistance, but the well-trained ponies were thoroughly in hand, and stood almost motionless as Sir Frederick greeted his friend.

"How do you do, Mr. Berry?" he said. "Home again, you see."

"We are all very glad to welcome you back, Sir Frederick, after so long an absence."

"But here is my excuse for my absence," replied the proud and happy husband. "Mr. Berry, Helen —a very old friend."

Mr. Berry thought, as he looked at her sunshiny face, that her husband had a right to be proud; and a few minutes afterwards, when her pleasant voice had been heard, the elder gentleman made up his mind that the younger was going to be happy. There is an old proverb in those parts, advising a man to choose a wife by the ear and not the eye. Sir Frederick had done better, and chosen by both.

"I must tell Mr. Berry, my love," said Sir Frederick, "how it was we nearly ran over him."

"Yes, and tell me, too," said the young wife, laughing. "What in the world were you about?"

"Lady Charrington has found out that our poor little Lipthwaite is like Edinburgh. Ought we not to be vain? Do you know Edinburgh, Berry?"

"Yes, tolerably well. It is the most picturesque city in the world, and I have seen most of the fine cities, I believe."

"I am to be taken to see them all," said Lady Charrington; "that is an engagement. But in the meantime I declare that my notion is not so ridiculous as to make it right to pull off the poor ponies' heads. Mr. Berry shall decide."

"Well, let him. Only as he was the Town Clerk of Lipthwaite before he gave up law and settled in the pretty place I'll show you presently, he will be prejudiced in favour of his borough."

"You see there is something in what I say," she answered, merrily, "or you would not be begging the judge to be impartial. But see. Here we are in a handsome street of new houses, and nice shops, and over there, running parallel with this, is that dear, queer, quaint, dirty old street—what did you call it, Fred?"

"Moggrums."

"It is a hideous name," Mr. Berry said, "and we have been half-a-dozen times going to change it for something more euphonious—only it has been found difficult to agree upon the new title. So we comfort ourselves by explaining to strangers that Moggrums is a corruption from the Latin, and that the Romans, when they settled here, called the place Morogesium —I do not believe that there ever was such a name, or that the Romans were here at all, and Lady Charrington must help us to a new name which we shall all like, and we will get rid of the fable."

"No, no," said Lady Charrington, "keep everything old. I love everything that is old. And now please to look again. That beautiful hill, with the dear heather on it—it is not very high, after what we have been seeing, but it stands on the left, in just the situation as regards the town as Arthur's Seat does to Edinburgh, and then on the other hill on our right are those ruins—they may stand for the Castle."

"They *are* the ruins of a castle, Lady Charrington, and there is a perfectly untrustworthy story of King John's having held a court there, and I am sorry to say that an irreverent inhabitant of Lipthwaite deposited in our museum some teeth found on the hill, with a label suggesting that they were some of the Jews' teeth which that Sovereign, you know, used to draw when he wanted money."

"And you have a museum, too? I must come and see it."

"And there's a museum in Edinburgh," laughed Sir Frederick, "so there's another likeness for you. Well, we'll get on home. Mr. Berry, I need not tell you how glad we shall be to see you at the Abbey—I don't mean morning calls, and all that, but come whenever you feel inclined. The pictures are there, the books are there, the coins are there, and we are there; and I don't think my father's dear old friend and mine wants more said to him."

"A great deal more," said Lady Charrington, instantly speaking kindly on seeing that her husband

felt kindly, "and he must come to the Abbey for me to say it to him."

And so they parted; but the Edinburgh notion, which of course Mr. Berry mentioned to his friends, was stereotyped in the Lipthwaite mind from that hour, and was duly set forth to all visitors—except Scottish ones. If it help the reader to comprehend somewhat of the features of our borough, the happy-hearted bride did not speak in vain. But we will fill up the outline a little.

Lipthwaite is in the leafy county of Surrey, and among all the pleasant little towns in pleasant England there is probably not one whose founders chose a better site. It stands in a valley bounded on the eastern side by a high ridge of well-defined hills of considerable height. Portions and strips of these are cultivated, and other sections of the hill-sides wear a close clothing of firs, which crown the very top, while the larger parts, and especially the bolder and the terminating heights, are wild common, studded with green knolls, and garnished with the purple heather. To penetrate from the open breezy hill-top into the winding glades of the little forests, and to refresh the eyes in the quiet shade, and to listen to the sheep-bell and the mill-splash, and then to emerge into the full light, and look out upon the broad prospect of a highly-cultured country, spotted here and there with villages, to which the eye is guided by the little spire or tower, is no great achievement in the way of sight-seeing; but that unheroic ramble, if undertaken in the heroic spirit

of patience and thankfulness, will not be unrewarded.

To return into Lipthwaite, in which it is desirable that a reader should feel himself at home, be it added that, although it possesses, as Lady Charrington has said, but two principal streets, lying nearly parallel, the one, old and irregular, and inhabited chiefly by the humbler class of our population (we were 4871 at the census of 1851), and the other built in more modern fashion, and containing some good shops, and many well-looking private houses, including our best and dearest hotel, the Barbel, those streets are connected, chiefly towards the two extremities, by several small and tortuous lanes, and these straggle out to various lengths from the town, some of them extending their broken lines of squalid white cottages nearly half a mile into the green fields, while others are brought up short, either by a stern red-brick house, which establishes itself as a sort of sentinel to prohibit further advance, or, more ignobly, by the darkening carcases of unfinished buildings, whose originators have had to be reminded by certain commissioners of a text about building without counting the cost. The outskirts of Lipthwaite, indeed, on the castle end, are not the portion of the town on which our pride, before mentioned, chiefly perches itself. What we do pique ourselves upon is, first, our noble old church, to which the Reformers did very little harm, and the churchwardens have done very little more, and where there is a wooden font of unequalled ugliness, which

we would not change for alabaster sculptured by Baron Marochetti. Secondly, we are proud of our Town Hall, which is hideous in point of architecture, and odious in point of accommodation, but in which King Charles II. was entertained to dinner, and made a joke which we loyally suppose that the mayor of the day was too frightened to recollect accurately, as it is so exceedingly stupid that we do not much care to repeat it. Thirdly, we are proud of a statue of Queen Anne, in white marble, to which some Hindoos, who were in the town in 1821, actually prostrated themselves, being suddenly struck by the extraordinary likeness of the work to one of their own frightful idols. And, lastly, we are proud of our prosperous literary institute, our very solvent gas works, our handsome workhouse, our increasing museum (to which a nobleman who cares nothing for zoology has generously given all his late father's collection of stuffed animals), our respectable Independent, Methodist, Baptist, and Unitarian chapels, and of our latest improvement of all, a drinking fountain, erected by our neighbour, Mr. Andover, who has done so many kind things for Lipthwaite (where there are a good many electors) that we form our own notions of his views for his eldest son, said to be a good speaker at the Union.

Now, to justify the answer about the distance from the railway-station, and at the same time to let the reader see a little into the character of the excellent Mr. Berry (of whom more will be heard in the course of the story), suppose we let him

state the case in a way to which he was rather partial.

"When my nephew, Horace Armstrong who is in the War Office, was visiting me here, two years ago," said the old gentleman, "I introduced him to most of my friends, and as he was a handsome, talkative, good-natured young fellow, who dressed very well, and made himself acceptable to the ladies, he enjoyed himself much, and left me alone a great deal, for which I was obliged to him. There were two families, in particular, by whom Mr. Horace was very much welcomed. These were next-door neighbours. Mr. Oliphant, who succeeded to my business, has a series of daughters, all more or less pretty, and willing to be appreciated by a young gentleman; and Mrs. Penson, widow of the East India captain, has another series with the same qualifications. These girls are all fast friends till further notice, and Horace Armstrong, introduced among them, became an extraordinary favourite. In fact the silly things made a perfect pet and idol of him, and as he had not the least objection to be so treated by a cluster of pretty merry girls, his time passed very happily. He got his holiday extended, and when his country could do without him no longer, he contrived to persuade me to buy him a month's railway-ticket, and let him stay at Lipthwaite, and run up to town every morning. It was the summer, to be sure, and it is a good thing for girls to get up early and take walks, and they have a right to walk which way they like. So there could be no objection to the Misses Oliphant

and the Misses Penson discovering that their pleasantest walk was one which always took my elegant nephew to an 8·45 train. They used to walk him round Spence's Gardens, down Love Lane into the fields, across the mill-stream, and under the hill, and so through the Ghost Copse to the road that leads to the station. At that time he always assured me that the walk was nothing, that it could be done in a quarter of an hour, and easily in twenty minutes. Now I know every stone on the road, and the walk is one of two miles and a quarter.

"Well, sir, one year ago, my beloved nephew, Horace, came down again. The pretty Oliphants and the pretty Pensons were just as ready to begin to pet him as ever; but the pet himself was in no mood for such attentions. He scarcely went near them, and when he had to go to London, he took the shortest cut that I could show him. Even this walk, which I can do in five-and-twenty minutes, he used to declare to be most weary and tedious; and he used to abuse the turns in the road for being so far off, and curse the poor monotonous palings for being so many—a fellow never seemed to have got past them—and vent the other wise and manly sentiments which a discontented young fellow lavishes upon inanimate objects when he is out of humour. The fact was, that he had become desperately smitten with the sister of a fellow War-Office-man, and being moreover in debt, he suddenly found his debts intolerable, as preventing his settlement in life. You may

easily guess what he wanted out of uncle, but uncle means to make Mr. Horace wait a bit. Meantime, he used to declare that the walk to the station was one of an hour and three-quarters, and the ugliest walk in all England. Now that is quite untrue, as you can see Hadbury Hill all the way; and for the winter, you are under the interlacing trees, to say nothing of our river, the Burde, which when at all swollen by rains is a handsome stream, over which you cross in your way to the rail."

With some of these localities you will become well acquainted before we conclude our narrative, and there is one other place in Lipthwaite to which it may be well to conduct you, that you may know it again when the time to revisit it arrives. This is the house of Mr. Berry himself. It stands upon some land once belonging to a client of his (such foundations to lawyers' houses are not infrequent), land which lies on a gentle slope a little way out of Lipthwaite, at the hill end of the town. From the lawn in front of the house we look upon Hadbury Hill, and see all the fine effects which the sun, either by his presence or his absence, loves to call up on mountain scenery, and even on such modest likeness to mountain scenery as our bold hills present. The town is entirely shut out from our view by a belt of trees on the right, and they form part of a semi-circle which protects the side and rear of the house, and extends downwards until stopped, somewhat abruptly, by a little clear quick stream of water (Mr. Berry's boundary), which ultimately finds its way

into the Burdett To the left the view is open, the most prominent object being the dark thick woods by which the Abbey, Sir Frederick Charrington's seat, is surrounded, and on the horizon are the Alster Hills, between which, in clear weather, the host can make out the sea, and his visitors say they can. The house itself, which is called Cromwell Lodge (in memory of a relative whose legacy enabled the owner to build it), is what the old gentleman himself describes as a "mild" specimen of modern Gothic.

"Fools," says Mr. Berry, "according to the proverb, build houses, and wise men live in them; but perhaps it means that a man grows wise after he has had to live for any time in a house he has been fool enough to build. If he does not—with the aid of his architect, of his servants, and his wife—he is unteachable indeed. I shall not say what this little place cost me, or anything about the trouble I had in persuading my friend, Mr. Gurgoyle, that I had better *not* add a new wing, and throw out a music-room, or anything about the servants I have discharged for wrenching my registers, burning my bath-pipe, and nailing up my ventilators. Nor will I say anything about the meek but persevering murmurs of Mrs. Berry, who has never been so happy in her neat, new rooms, with their gilding and all the rest of it, as she was in the old house in Lipthwaite, where she had a deep dark cupboard at every turn, and—nay, let me do her woman's heart better justice—where those whom it did not please

God to spare us, used to race and riot till the fatal month—the cholera month—which opened upon us as the parents of three loving children, and went out with the day on which we laid the last baby in Lipthwaite churchyard. I have never complained to poor Marion that she is not happy in the pleasant home I have given her.

"My friend Gurgoyle," resumed the old gentleman, after a pause, "was not profound in his art, but then I did not know enough of architecture to warrant my interference, and I did know enough of the world to be sure that if I interfered I should make matters worse, especially as regarded the expenditure. So he had his own way, and though the windows are not exactly the right thing, I can see out of them capitally; and though the porch is said to be very objectionable, I can sit there with much comfort in the evening; and as for the chimneys, if they had been more like what Mr. Pugin, or Mr. Slater would have approved, I dare say they would have smoked just as badly as they did until we made their ugliness uglier by our tin tubes and cowls. The house is well enough, and nobody finds fault with my comfortable dining-room on the left, or I may say, with anything that is set upon my bright old table, which I bought when I married. Nor does anybody, except poor Mrs. Berry, dislike my pretty drawing-room on the right, with its view of the Hill. There is my library beyond the dining-room, and I have some good books there, and a few rare ones—also, some coins, especially the Cæsars in

gold, and a fair English series—but nothing very remarkable. There is a fine collection at the Abbey, but Sir Frederick knows only that it *is* fine—his father and I used to wrangle about a coin as stubbornly as the deceased heathens for whom it was struck could have done, when making some of their Pagan bargains. Sir Charles Charrington was a singular old man, and very clever, though he did not know so much of coins as he imagined."

And thus much for our pleasant town of Lipthwaite.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN a Frenchman's wife disappears (if the fact is likely to be known among his friends) he selects his seconds, and practises his thrust in tierce. When the same misfortune happens to an American, he fills his pocket with revolvers, and bides his time. When an Englishman is so unhappy as to find his castle left unto him desolate, he consults his solicitor.

Let it be distinctly understood at the outset of our narrative, that Arthur Lygon, shocked, staggering, bewildered, was loyal and true to the woman whom he loved. For not one moment did the husband of Laura admit to his heart a single thought that accused her honour and his own. The first idea that would occur to most men, surrounded by such circumstances as those described in our opening chapter, would be, not unnaturally, that conjugal relations between the wife and the husband were over for ever and ever. That first idea would have been the very last for Arthur Lygon, or, rather, it never arose to him at all. After a long and wearying night, during which every possibility that his brain could suggest as the cause of the sorrow that had come upon him presented itself with sickening iteration, until the gradually deadening faculty

refused to be driven along the dreary paths of conjecture, and the bright dawn found him pale, nervous, and agitated, Lygon's true heart was still brave and firm enough to resist, unconsciously, the entrance of any base thought. His wife had encountered some fearful misfortune, and to rescue her, and restore her to the home whence she had been lured, or forced, or driven by some agency which it was his to trace and punish—that was Arthur Lygon's business. And when, after that terrible night-watch, he stood at his opened window, and cooled his forehead in the soft air of the summer morning, he had no angry words to utter, no sighs for his own tribulation, no reproaches against an undeserved destiny to pour out, after the fashion of heroes who are suddenly grieved or wronged. His one thought was for the delivery of Laura from the unknown enemy. A most unpicturesque, ineffective hero, indeed, and one upon whom such a chance of melting pathos and of fiery declamation was wantonly wasted, but you must take him as he is. The loss is mine. I mourn for the eloquence that he might have launched into the night, the vows which he might have called on the rising sun to attest and register. In lieu of such a record, I have to do the humblest duty, that of telling the exact truth. Miserable and disturbed, he waited for the day, and when the morning was somewhat advanced, he bathed, dressed, and left his room as calmly, to outward appearances, as he had done on the preceding day.

With prompt resolve that there should be no

shadow of suspicion in his household, Mr. Lygon had, within an hour from receiving the mysterious message, gone down-stairs, and in the presence of the children, but not addressing the falsehood to them—we are strange creatures—had informed a servant that a very dear friend of himself and of Mrs. Lygon lay at the point of death in Herefordshire, and that she had most properly hurried off in hope to be in time to see the departing lady. He managed, as if accidentally, to drop into the explanation a word or two implying that the dying friend was rich, thus certain to convey an impression which would be at once acceptable to domestics, for whom the information was intended. He trusted that in five minutes they would be cunningly nodding their heads in approval of their mistress's cleverness in looking after the interests of her family; and he was not deceived. He even went through the ceremony of the dinner, and his silence and thoughtfulness were easily accounted for by his servants. It had been cruel work, however, to contend against the chatter of the children.

"Has the lady ever been here, papa?" demanded Frederick. "Do we know her?"

"No, no, dear."

"Have *I* seen her?" asked Walter, who, as the eldest, deemed that his prolonged experience had probably embraced the acquaintance in question.

"No, Walter. But we'll not talk about it any more, dears. The loss of one whom we love is a very sad thing, and at present we do not know

what it may please God should happen. So we will not speak any more about it until we hear from mamma."

And, as may easily be supposed, the few hours during which it was necessary to support appearances seemed anything but few or brief to Arthur Lygon; but they passed. His children's last kisses were warm upon his cheek when he once more locked himself into the room in which a happy father had, on three anxious, happy days, presented a newly-born child for the kiss of a pale but smiling mother—of her who had left him and all of them.

When Mr. Lygon, accompanied by little Clara, proud of being her father's companion, and almost prouder of being placed in charge of carpet-bag and cloaks, reached Lipthwaite, he drove straight to the house of Mr. Berry, but found that the latter had taken his pony and ridden across to the Abbey. Mrs. Berry had gone into the town, but the servant, who knew Mr. Lygon well, and was rapturous at the sight of the little girl of whom much had been heard, but who had never visited the place where her beautiful mother had been married, was as ready with the hospitality of Cromwell Lodge as the owners could have been. Lunch was to be ready in ten minutes, and an early dinner should be got for Miss Clara, and, in the meantime, would she have some strawberries and cream after the journey?

"Thanks, Hester, thanks. But, no, we will not have anything at present. We'll leave our things,

and take a walk. I want to show my little girl the Hill and the view, and when we come back, I dare say that your master or mistress will have returned."

Hester made another struggle to administer refreshment of some kind.

"Indeed she does not want anything," said Mr. Lygon. "It is but two hours since we breakfasted. Look here, Hester, I see the great telescope is still sticking out at the library window."

"Master is never tired of looking through that, sir, and finding out all that goes on up on the Hill."

"Well, if he comes in before we return, tell him to look there for us. Now, Clara, darling."

"But let me just cut a paper of sandwiches for Miss Clara," pleaded Hester. "The air up there gives people such an appetite, if we might guess, master says, by the awful great baskets they take up with 'em."

"We shall be all the readier for lunch, Hester, thank you," said Mr. Lygon, leading Clara away with him.

The child was delighted with the walk, with the little tree-bridge over the clear water, in which she actually saw a fish, and with the ascent of the height, and her merry chatter rattled out unceasingly. She was never much at a loss for talk, but the best orators are aided by accidents, and when Miss Clara's discourse was helped by such sparkling incidents as the scramble of a real squirrel u p a tre close to her, by the vision of a little snake writhing

across the path, and the meeting a boy with a hedge-hog, which he presented to her in the kindest and uncouthest manner, and which she carried a good way, to the extreme detriment of her prettily-fitting little green gloves (when releasing it being utterly out of the question with her, her father transferred it to his pocket), it may easily be imagined that her voice was very busy with the echoes of our hill.

"Oh! if mamma could only see this lovely place," she exclaimed, as they turned out of some shade, stood on the rocky edge, and saw the rich country below flooded with the sunshine of a summer noon.

"My child, she knows every bit of this hill, and all round it, as well as I do, and better."

And indeed it was true, for it was around, and about, and over the hill that Laura Vernon had guided Arthur Lygon in the happy days when he was persuading her to let him be her guide over the Hill of Difficulty called Life.

"Oh! I wish she was here."

"So do I, love," said Mr. Lygon, in a voice which he endeavoured, not very successfully, to make a cheerful one.

They followed to its end a path which was about two-thirds up the hill, and which, winding through a thick shade, terminated on an open, on which the bright white light shone in all its power. Here Lygon stopped, pointed out to Clara a few of the points in the landscape, and then told her to wander about, if she liked, as he would lie down, and look at something he had to read.

"Don't go too far from me, and keep out of the sun, darling. Call out to me, if you miss your way."

"But you will take care of the poor little hedgehog, papa?"

"All care, dear."

And the happy child departed on her exploration, singing gaily, and with her head full of hedgehogs, squirrels, snakes, caves, and all the wonders of the new world into which she had been brought.

* * * * *

"Papa! papa!"

It was, however, only a cry of delight and excitement that roused him from his own thoughts. A few steps brought him where he could see her, above him.

And a prettier little fairy of the forest had not been seen on the old hill. In a setting of green leaves, her light dress stood out like some strange new flower, and as her dark hair fell over her shoulders—the hat on the ground was much too full of wild-flowers, coloured stones, and other treasures, to be at all available for its ordinary purpose—and stirred in the slight breezes, her bright face, flushed with heat and delight, quite glowed while she stood intently watching some object below. Even her father's troubled eye could not fail to note her rare beauty.

"I see the house, I see the telescope!" she cried, "and a gentleman at the door is waving a handkerchief at me."

And she waved her own in return, with infinite energy, and her eyes sparkled as she perceived that her fairy signal was recognised.

They returned to the lodge, and found not only Mr. Berry but his wife, and were heartily welcomed by the former, and were received with all proper and decorous attention by the latter.

"But how shabby to come without Laura," said Mr. Berry. "Clara, how could you let papa leave mamma behind?"

"But mamma has gone into the country herself, so we couldn't bring her," explained Clara.

Foreseeing the question, Mr. Lygon had prepared himself with the reply. Mr. and Mrs. Berry had known his wife from girlhood, and the half explanation which Lygon had made at home would, he felt, be hardly sufficient for the Berrys, who were tolerably well acquainted with the names, at least, of all her intimate friends. He had come down to give his full confidence to Mr. Berry, but had not the slightest intention of entrusting it to the solicitor's wife, whom indeed he loved not.

"Yes," said Mr. Lygon, promptly—perhaps a little more promptly than would have been quite natural had there been no secret to keep. "Poor Mrs. Cateaton—did you not meet her at our house, Mrs. Berry, when you came to town the year before last—"

"I do not seem to remember the name," said Mrs. Berry, looking him very straight in the face with her cold, light, but not very clear eyes.

Mrs. Berry was some ten or twelve years younger than her husband. In earlier life she had seemed passably pretty, when seen in a group of young girls, a sort of partnership which, to a careless eye, invests all the members of the firm with shares in the personal advantages of each. But when an observer, drawing back from the party, calmly and silently limited the partnership, and assigned to each young lady her own portion of the united assets, he did not make much of the contributions of Marion Wagstaffe. Against a pleasant though cold smile, a clear blonde complexion, rather a good figure, white, but not small hands, a readiness of speech, some neatness in language, and perfect self-composure, which one might transfer to the wrong side of the account by calling it self-complacency, the accountant had to set the light eyes that have been mentioned, and to add that they were objectionably watchful, and never in repose. He had also to note that the voice which proceeded from those unsympathetic-looking lips was, though clear, liable to become too high for a sensitive ear, and though this would have been of no consequence, had the habitual utterances been kindly, he would have remarked that Miss Wagstaffe's *forte* was in retort, and that even in the lightest conversation her share was usually the detection of a friend's ignorance, or the correction of a friend's English. Marion was tall, and height is a merit in its way; but not especially so when one avails oneself of it as a tower of espial, and rejoices in the ability to look down

with undue ease upon the misdoings of a shorter world;—and so did Marion Wagstaffe use those extra inches. Certainly she was not an amiable girl, but, dressing well, smiling readily, and keeping her light braided hair very neat, she somehow took her place among amiable girls, and used to be invited a good deal by people who would scarcely have cared to say that they liked her. She could not sing, but had grappled determinately with the key-board, and what mechanical labour can attain there, Marion had seized, and marked the time with commendable precision when she played quadrilles —everybody has some virtue.

This was the account as it would have been made up, errors excepted, when she was two-and-twenty. In completing it, to be rendered at the date of our story, the age had to be doubled, and important additions had to be made. Among them was her having become possessed of about four hundred a year in her own right (by the bequest of a distant relative, who was most anxious to leave her property not only away from her near relations, but in a quarter whence it was morally certain that no weakness would send back a shilling to the baffled expectants), and her having secured the hand of the prosperous solicitor of Lipthwaite. How Edward Allingham Berry was induced to marry a woman who was certainly about as unlike himself in character as possible, it is not for me to try to explain. He was rich, and therefore the addition of riches might have been an aid in bringing about

the union. But he was a thoughtful man, and could scarcely have admired her shallow smartness; a kindly man, and could not but dislike her incessant antagonism; a sincere man (attorneyism deducted), and must have been annoyed by her mysteries and reticences. However, they married, and it is just to say that the unamiable woman became a most foolishly indulgent and devoted mother, and that the blow which took her children from her was more terribly felt than the world believed that Marion Berry could feel. Nevertheless, it did not soften her, though it went well nigh to crush her. The cold smile was almost as ready on the thin lips as of old. Such was the person who was looking at Mr. Lygon, and waiting further explanation of Mrs. Lygon's absence from London.

"Why, papa," broke in Clara, "you told Walter that the lady had never been at our house."

"No, no, dear," said Mr. Lygon, calmly. "I told him that he did not know her. But I thought, Mrs. Berry, that you had met Mrs. Cateaton. What put that into my head? However, she is exceedingly —dangerously—ill, and she telegraphed for Laura to go down and see her."

"What part of the country?"

"Herefordshire."

"My aunt Empson comes from Herefordshire. She will be here in the course of the afternoon, and perhaps knows the lady. What—"

"Ah!" said Lygon, quickly, for he wanted, of course, to ask a question just here instead of answer-

ing one. "What part of the country does your aunt come from?"

Did he expect to win the trick? Mrs. Berry suspected nothing, but habit induced her always to take every conversational advantage.

"Why," she said, "—um—dear me—tst—tst—I hope that I am not losing my memory as well as my eyesight—what *is* the place called? I shall be able to tell you in a minute. What is the name of Mrs. Cateaton's place—that may bring it to me?"

"Long Edgecombe," said Mr. Lygon, who thought an invented name was safer than a real one.

"I don't remember that name; but we'll look at the map presently, and that will remind me of aunt's place."

"Meantime we'll have some lunch," said Mr. Berry. "You can't think how glad I am to see you, Arthur. And one word's as good as a hundred—we're not going to have a fly-away visit from you this time, especially as you have brought Miss to see her mama's country. To-day we'll have a chat and a ramble, but to-morrow we'll give her a long drive, perhaps to Bingley, and Saturday we'll talk about by and by. Lord Annonbury's grounds are open on Saturdays, but I'm afraid not the house, and that's the best part of the sight—but I'll ascertain."

And over these and other of the kindly schemings of a host who is delighted to see his guests, Mr. Berry talked during the lunch.

"Do you like leaving your house to the care of servants only?" said Mrs. Berry. She did not mean

to be inhospitable, but it was in her nature to take the least pleasant view of everything.

"One would rather not, of course," replied Mr. Lygon. "But Price is quite a person to trust at need."

"But there was no need for you to leave until Mrs. Lygon came back."

"Civil speech, my dear," said Mr. Berry, "considering that Arthur left town to come to us."

"I don't imagine that Mr. Lygon suspects me of intending to be uncivil, Edward," said Mrs. Berry, putting on the grievance-look which some women assume with such promptness. "I suppose that he would have too much self-respect to visit where the lady of the house was capable of anything of the kind."

"Well, take some wine with him then," said Mr. Berry, laughing, "and show him that you are very glad to see him."

"I am taking bitter ale, as you know I always do in the morning, Mr. Berry, but Mr. Lygon wants no assurance that he is welcome."

"Then he shall take wine with me," said Mr. Berry. "Your health, Arthur, and the missus's, and yours, Miss Clara, and may you make as pretty and good a woman as mamma."

"As good and as pretty, *I* should have said," observed Mrs. Berry, "if it had been necessary to say anything about prettiness at all. May you be a good girl, Clara, as far as any of us can be said to be good, and never mind about the looks."

And Mrs. Berry sipped at her bitter mixture. Those may call it ale who have no national feelings, no love of national traditions, and no sense of the responsibilities of language, but there is one pen that shall never so disgrace its Mother Goose.

"Never mind about the looks!" repeated Mr. Berry, cheerily. "But I do mind about the looks, and I mind about them a great deal. I hate ugly people, and I always used to like them to be on the other side of a case in which I was engaged. One made out one's costs with such gusto when one thought what a hideous face the enemy would twist over a good bouncing item."

"Mr. Lygon knows best," said Mrs. Berry; "but if I had a child of that age in the room I should desire her to go and walk in the garden rather than hear such teaching."

Clara's eyes turned to her father's, and they exchanged that look of love and confidence, that all but suppressed smile, which mean perfect mutual understanding, and leave little need for words.

"Not a bad notion, though," said Mr. Berry, "as we seem to have done lunch. Let us all go and look at the garden. Take another glass of the Madeira first, Arthur. You may trust it."

It might not appear to an ordinary observer to be of much consequence whether Mrs. Berry became freckled or not; but as that person herself entertained a different opinion, and saw fit to go away and provide herself with a brown hat and a blue sun-shade, she afforded Arthur Lygon an opportu-

nity of saying a word or two, in an undertone, to Mr. Berry.

"Of course," replied his friend.

"It is very rude to whisper in company, papa," said Clara, laughing saucily.

"So it is," said Mrs. Berry, re-entering, duly protected against the sun. "I am glad the little girls are taught good manners in these days."

They went out into the garden, and Mr. Berry, in directing Clara to the path that led to the strawberry-beds, performed a clever manœuvre, for the child went skimming away like a glad bird to the place he pointed out, and Mrs. Berry, in accordance with her nature, immediately followed the child to prevent her unrestrained enjoyment. Yet Mrs. Berry had been a mother, and, as has been said, a doting one.

"I am here to consult you," said Arthur Lygon, hurriedly, the moment her sharp ears were out of range, "upon a sad affair. How can we speak without interruption?"

"Easily. But a word. Not an affair of your own?"

"Indeed, yes."

The elder man touched his friend's hand for a second only.

"You want to telegraph to town," he said. "I'll drive you over to Marfield, as it is just as well that our Lipthwaite gossips—you understand."

They walked to the strawberries, at which Clara had made her first dash with all the delight of a

child who had never seen such things, except in dishes, and to whom, therefore, the red fruit, lurking under the leaves, seemed downright treasures—jewels.

"Come off the mould, dear," Mrs. Berry was crying to her, "and come off at once, or you will stain your frock."

"Let her stain it," said Mr. Berry, deprecatingly.

"That Mrs. Lygon may infer, even if she should not say, that I am incompetent to take the charge of a child for a single day. I am obliged to you, Mr. Berry."

"Mrs. Lygon has not to form her opinion of you after all these years, my dear."

"If she happen to have formed a good one, I prefer that she should retain it, Mr. Berry."

"All right, my dear. But look here. Which of the horses had I better have put to the chaise? For here is Lygon, like all the Londoners I ever knew, no sooner gets out of town than he wants to be sending a message back, and so I must drive him to Marfield. There's a telegraph station there."

"But why not telegraph from Lipthwaite?" replied Mrs. Berry.

"Why," replied Mr. Berry, artfully, "*you* put me on my guard there, with what you said about Thomas Letts being fool enough to let his young wife come into the office and learn things, and how that business of Wendale's got wind. A message to Somerset House may not exactly concern little Mrs. Letts."

"I am glad that a hint I take the liberty of giving may, sometimes, be worth attention," said Mrs. Berry, immediately dispatching a gardener to order the chaise.

"I would go with you," said she, "only aunt is coming over."

Arthur Lygon felt more kindly towards that relative than he had done when her name was first mentioned. He hoped to see the lady on his return. "Clara would stay, and say so."

Clara did not look exactly delighted at the idea of being left with Mrs. Berry, but was much too good a child to show discontent. In a few minutes more the gentlemen had driven off.

"That's not the way to Marfield," said Mrs. Berry, watching the chaise as it turned to the right, at the cross road, instead of keeping on straight, up Bolk's Hill. That was an oversight of Mr. Berry's, who was so anxious to hear what Arthur had to say, that he hurried on to Rinckley Common, the place he had mentally decided on for their conversation.

They were speedily at the Common, a wide, wild-looking, high-lying expanse, studded with gorse patches; and here Mr. Berry pulled up.

"We could as easily have shut ourselves up in the library, you know, but then it would have been known that we *had* been shut up for a talk," he said.

They left the chaise, and the horse, accustomed to such intervals of work, set himself quietly to graze.

"Now, my dear Arthur, what is it?"

CHAPTER IV.

MUCH as Arthur Lygon had to tell, it needed but few words to tell it, and it was told.

Mr. Berry looked at him earnestly, sorrowfully, for a few moments.

"You have told me all?" he asked.

"All," replied Lygon.

"And why have you told it me?"

"Why?" returned Arthur. "Are you surprised that in such a sorrow I should come to consult the oldest and the best friend I have in the world?"

"No," said Berry, "I am not surprised, and if the word were not out of place on such an occasion, I would say that I am gratified. At all events, you do what is both natural and wise. Of course I accept your confidence, and of course I will do my best for you. But now go on."

"I do not understand. I have given you every detail."

"Of Laura's flight, yes. But come, be a man. You *must* speak out, if any good is to be done."

"But I have no more to say," said Lygon, surprised, and a little impatiently. "I repeat taht I don't understand you. Ask me any question."

"That is just what I am doing, but you evade my question."

"I evade a question! Put it again."

"Why did Mrs. Lygon leave your home?"

"My God!" said Arthur, "is not that the mystery which you must help me to solve?"

"I repeat, be a man, Arthur. Come."

"I swear," said Lygon, "that your meaning is a mystery to me."

"Arthur," said Mr. Berry, "it is not kind of you to force me to use words that even hint at shame. But if you will have it so, tell me. Do you believe that Mrs. Lygon left your house with a lover, or to join one?"

The young husband turned a ghastly white, and he felt his limbs tremble under him at the presence of the foul phantom which these words had called up. But he confronted the phantom only to denounce it as a lie, and to trample through it on the instant. Another moment, and his eyes flashed with an honest anger, and the paleness had utterly disappeared, face and brow speaking as plainly as the eyes.

"I am answered," said Mr. Berry.

"Take an answer in words, though," said Arthur Lygon, in a hoarse voice. "If—" His friend interrupted him.

"Let no idle words pass between us," said Mr. Berry, gravely. "We have bitterness enough to deal with. You would say that the idea I ventured to raise came before you for the first time, and is so false, so abhorrent to your nature, that nothing but your feeling that I did not speak in levity, but as an

old man who would serve a young friend, prevented your striking me down upon this grass."

"Something of that," said Arthur, recovering himself. "Not the violent thought you would suggest—but—well, Berry, it *is* a wickedness to have spoken the words of her—in connection with her name."

"It is," said Mr. Berry, "and I feel it as deeply as you can do. But you forced me to put that wicked question by evading a more harmless one. You will not continue to do so."

"Berry, you speak as if you thought I were keeping back something which I ought to say."

"So you are."

"Ask for it, and hear it."

"If I put it again, it will be in words that may offend you."

"Nothing that does not affect her can offend me—nothing from you can or shall." And he held out his hand.

"A good woman," said Mr. Berry, retaining his hold on Lygon's hand, "does not leave her husband's home for any fault of her own. In that case, if she leaves it, the fault must be his."

Arthur Lygon looked the other full and fairly in the face.

"I answer your look," said Mr. Berry. "I have seen a good deal of the world—both sides of it—and knowing how lightly people can absolve themselves from offences of their own, you will pardon me if I push my question. *You* have done nothing to drive Laura from her home?"

"I!" repeated Arthur. "I, who love her better than my life, and only ask to spend my life in making hers happy! I drive her away! Are you mad?"

"I believe all you say," said the old lawyer. "But you need not be told that women have strange ideas, and that matters which we pass over as trifles sometimes determine their whole lives. You have nearly satisfied me, and yet I should like you to tell me, in plain English, one thing."

"I beg of you—ask it."

"You are a handsome man—you were a favourite with women—I do not believe that you would deliberately do wrong; but has anything survived from the old days, or is there any momentary folly that can have reached Laura's ears?"

"On my honour,—no. On my honour,—no. And if it sounds foolishly when I say that not only do I love her heartily and thoroughly, but that she seems to me so incalculably superior, both in mind and body, to anything I have seen since my marriage, I can't help that. I swear to you that you have got the truth."

"And I am right glad to get it. That is enough, my dear Arthur. And now the ground is clear, in one sense, though the making it so increases our difficulties ten-fold. Husband and wife being alike without fault as regards one another, and yet being separated, we approach a mystery. I suppose we shall break into it, but we must see."

"Remember, I have nothing else in life to live for," said Arthur, passionately.

"Yes, you have, Arthur, much. Even if the mystery should baffle you to your dying hour, you have that child beyond the hill, and two other children in London to live for, besides your duty."

"A cold word, that," said Arthur, "and you must believe it very potent with me, when you, just now, imputed to me that I could be false to the best woman in the whole world for the sake of some wretched intrigue. But we will not talk of that now. Answer me, Berry, for my head has been in one whirl, and only the necessity of hypocrisy has kept me straight —answer me, what is the first thing that occurs to you as the key to this accursed mystery?"

"You must give me time."

"No, but your first thought? Don't refuse it. If you could know what kind of night I have spent, madly plunging my hand into darkness, as it were, to try to grapple with a belief, with an idea, you would not refuse it."

"I have not a definite answer to make. I could, perhaps, say something; but it would, in all probability, be wrong, and to lead you astray, at such a moment, would be a sin. Yet—stay. I might be raising another horror, in simply telling you to dispel one idea which perhaps has not come across you. Tell me, Arthur—and do not think me fencing with your question—have you, yourself, settled, or tried to settle, upon any conviction?"

Arthur Lygon again turned pale.

"One thought," he said, in a low voice, "came whispering near me in the darkness, and would not

be driven away. It is not *my* thought, but it would come, and return, though I cursed it off. Mind, and for God's sake remember, the thought is NOT mine, nor is there the slightest foundation for it in this world. I scarcely dare repeat it."

Mr. Berry gazed earnestly into the pale agitated face, and in answer to his reiterated demand he saw the lips of Arthur Lygon form themselves for the utterance of one expected word.

"Do not say it," said Berry.

"It has crossed your mind, too, then?" gasped Arthur, his face becoming still ghastlier.

"No."

"Ah!" said Lygon, the tears almost forcing their way to his eyes, "then you have another solution."

"Do not press me, that is a kind fellow, until I shall tell you that I am ready to speak. At present, and suddenly collecting all the reminiscences I can, and without time to marshal them, or to weigh their value, I think I may say—and I am really striving to use words that shall be as indefinite as I can make them—I think I may say that there are conjectures which we are bound to exhaust before we dare—"

"Stop," said Arthur Lygon, "you have used a word which you would not use lightly—reminiscences. Are they connected with my life or hers? You can answer that without consideration."

"Yours," said Mr. Berry, quickly.

It was an untruth. The word on which Lygon

had fixed, his friend had used unadvisedly. And before the last question was put, such thoughts came, darkening, around the memories which Berry spoke of, that he feared, without more cautious preparation, to let Lygon enter the circle. He judged it safer to exclude him by that single word of reply, which, however, should have been

"Hers."

"Mine?" said Lygon. "The weight that you would take from my mind, if you could show that anything in *my* life had been the spring of this. I should enter so cheerfully, or at least so courageously upon the quest which we have now to begin."

"In defiance of those words of warning in the parting note?"

"They are not her words. And if they were, they must have been forced from her by some strange and damnable cheat. While I speak—a light! Has some one lied to her in the spirit of what you were imputing just now?"

"Would Laura endure *any* charge against her husband—at least without laying her hand in his, and asking whether he dared retain it?"

"You are right, and my thought wrongs her," said Arthur, slowly.

His lingering utterance did not escape the notice of his friend, who, however, made no remark upon it then.

"You must give me time, I repeat," said Mr. Berry. "A day is not now of consequence, as you

allowed the first hours to pass without taking any active steps."

"Would you have had me treat her as a criminal?" asked Arthur; "have had her described to the police, and notice given to stop her at the seaports, and on the railways?"

"You have not done it," said Mr. Berry, "and as it is now too late, we need not consider what a husband might have been justified in doing. Such steps as you have taken seem very prudent, as there is nothing for any one to say against Mrs. Lygon, did she return to-morrow."

"If she return to-morrow ten years, no one shall say a word against her," said Arthur.

"I am a hard old lawyer," said Berry, touched; "but I think I believe that love like that felt by you is too true to be ultimately unrewarded. Yes, I believe that you will be delivered out of this misery."

"I pray that I may," said Lygon, "for it is indeed a misery hard to be borne."

CHAPTER V.

As if by tacit understanding, the friends spoke no more on the subject nearest their hearts. During the short drive back to the lodge, Arthur Lygon was mentally occupied in reviewing such incidents of his early life as he could upon the moment summon to his recollection, but, as usual, memory, often so unwelcomely pertinacious in voluntarily presenting her panorama, painted with pitiless exactness, would, when peremptorily called upon, yield up little but disjointed fragments, recurring again and again like the *ægri somnia.* Nevertheless, his strong consciousness that there was nothing which he could in reason charge against himself as a wrong to his wife, afforded to Lygon an honest consolation, though that conviction in no degree tended to diminish the mystery that lay before him. It was perhaps for the best that Mr. Berry had guided the husband's thoughts in a given direction, and concentrated them, for the time at least, within a certain limit, for nothing probably is more prostrating to the courage of the mind than its being incessantly sent forth in pursuit of a phantom enemy. In the meantime, Mr. Berry's own thoughts had to pursue a far subtler and more dangerous track, and the manifestation which Arthur Lygon had made of an

earnest and loyal faith in her whom he had lost, impressed his friend more and more deeply each time he recurred to it with a sense of the terrible consequences that would attend a false step on the part of his adviser.

His adviser had made one false step at the very threshold, for he permitted Mr. Lygon, unsupported, to encounter a lady whose suspicious and jealous nature had already made her half an enemy, and who needed but little provocation to become a determined though undeclared one. Mr. Berry set down Arthur at the porch, and drove round to the stables.

Clara was with Mrs. Berry in the dining-room, the little girl having, much to her unexpressed discontent, been withdrawn from the pleasures of the garden, and set down, in a half-darkened apartment, to amuse herself with the pictures in Fox's Book of Martyrs. Privately, Clara probably considered herself entitled to a place in the collection.

Mrs. Berry was about to rise and question Lygon as to what he had done, and get him to commit himself before Mr. Berry's arrival. Then it occurred to her to use a proxy to entrap him.

"There is your papa, Clara! Run and ask him whether he has sent off his message all right."

Too happy to escape the fires of Smithfield and their distorted occupants, Clara bounded away to her father, and asked the question.

"All right, love," returned Mr. Lygon, kissing her. "And what have you been doing?"

"O, nothing," replied Clara, in anything but a tone of pleasure.

"She said that you had particularly desired her, when on the hill, to keep out of the sun," said Mrs. Berry, as they entered, "and therefore I presumed that I should be acting in accordance with your wishes in detaining her in the house."

Poor Clara! She had little thought, when rattling out her hill experiences, before chilled down by Mrs. Berry and Mr. Fox, that her casual mention of papa's hint was to be made a solemn justification for spoiling her afternoon. But this was one of Mrs. Berry's habitual unfairnesses to helpless persons. That form of cowardly unkindness is one of the earliest shocks which children undergo, and by no means the lightest. I am far from sure that the shabby woman who decoys a child up an alley and steals its shoes, does not deserve a month less at hard labour than her well-dressed sister who steals a child's confidences, and rolls them up into a stone to smite it.

"You found the person at the Marfield telegraph intelligent, I hope?" said Mrs. Berry, point-blank.

"I thought over the business again, during the drive," said Mr. Lygon, "and came to the conclusion that the message would do as well in a letter."

"Oh! then you did not go to Marfield," said Mrs. Berry. She would have liked to ascertain more, but time was precious. "Then I will get you the writing-case, so that the letter may be

despatched by our boy, who goes into Lipthwaite at five o'clock."

She hastened from the room, and her knowledge of the localities enabled her to intercept Mr. Berry as he came from the stables.

"Oh! you here!" she said. "Why did not you let Sykes take the chaise round?"

"I didn't see Sykes."

"Mr. Lygon told Clara that he sent off his message all right," said Mrs. Berry.

"What was the good of his telling her that?" thought the lawyer; who, being out of business, was now opposed to all unnecessary falsifications. "Well, my dear," he said, "is it any such feat of genius to despatch a telegraphic message?"

"I do not know why you cannot answer me without a sneer, Mr. Berry. Is there anything unreasonable in my being interested in what your friend does?"

"Quite the reverse, my dear," said her husband, endeavouring to come into the house. "Your attention is extremely hospitable, and I hope that your dinner, by-and-by, will be equally worthy of your estimable character."

Now, Mrs. Berry could with pleasure have fired a hot shot in reply to this, but as she would have gained nothing thereby, she reserved her fire, and only said:

"I dare say that the dinner will be satisfactory, Mr. Berry, and if I mentioned the telegraph, I suppose that after the intimation I ventured to give in

reference to Mrs. Letts, my presumption is not unpardonable."

"My dear, your expenditure of syllables is almost an extravagance," said Mr. Berry, coolly, making his way past her not very exuberant form, and going into the house.

She was not generous, but she would willingly have given a not very small sum of money to have obtained from Mr. Berry a distinct statement that the message had been despatched. For during the absence of her husband and Mr. Lygon she had accidentally mentioned their errand to a tradesman to whom she had been speaking in the kitchen, and he had expressed regret that the gentlemen should have gone to Marfield, as the telegraph instrument there had been out of order for some days, and the people were coming from London to repair it on Saturday.

Not that Mr. Berry would have very much cared about being confronted with this kind of contradiction, for after an endeavour of some years to make her as frank and free-spoken as himself, and after many efforts to rout out all her nests and treasures of petty mysteries, and to let in the sunshine of perfect matrimonial trust and confidence, he had given up the game, allowing the thin lips to speak or be silent, as they pleased; and for his own part, he had dropped into the habit of telling her, as he said, "as much truth as was good for her."

But she would have had a good *casus belli* against Mr. Lygon, whom she was learning to regard with

very unfriendly eyes. However, she had got something yet, to make him uncomfortable with.

Mrs. Berry returned to the room, bringing the writing-case.

"There, Mr. Lygon, now you can write your letter, and the boy shall wait for it."

"Confound the woman, boring," was Mr. Lygon's savage remark to himself—a set of words supposed to be about as often thought and as seldom uttered as any form of petition which has been devised for the use of man.

He dragged the note-paper before him, and was just going to write something, anything, to go off to town to a fellow employé,—it was less trouble than declining,—when the lady proceeded.

"And here, just direct this envelope for me. I must write a few words to Laura, assuring her that her little girl is all right and safe with me, and that the longer she stays the better. I forget what you called the place in Hertfordshire—Edgington, was it?"

She never forgot anything, and knew quite well that he had said Herefordshire and Long Edgecombe, but there was no trick here; it was simply that the lying woman was in the habit of lying plausibly.

"Thank you," said Mr. Lygon, kindly, while overflowing with sudden wrath and some apprehension at the proposed proceeding. "Yes, she will be glad to hear. And yet I hardly know whether you had better direct to the country, as there is a whole

series of cross-posts, and there is no saying when she will get the letter."

"Well, it is only a penny, if it follows her back to London," said Mrs. Berry, "and the chance of her hearing is worth that. I have been a mother, Mr. Lygon, and I know what it is to have news of one's children in absence."

Arthur Lygon, in no respect softened by this appeal, did not exactly see his way to parry the demand, and wrote upon the envelope, "Mrs. Lygon, Long Edgecombe, Herefordshire."

"Won't you put Mrs. Eatoncamp's name? We country people like that done."

"Mrs. Eatoncamp?" replied Arthur. And it occurred to him, poor fellow, in his strait, that if he adopted that blunder, and the letter miscarried—

And he wrote "Mrs. Eatoncamp."

And if he had looked at Mrs. Berry at that moment, he would have seen a sudden light come into her light eyes. She knew well what name he had mentioned. And here he deliberately wrote another, one of her own supplying. Stop a moment! He and her husband had been whispering, for she had heard the child laughingly rebuke them. What did they whisper about? They started, at all events, saying they were going to Marfield, and the very next moment they drove off in another direction. Why did Mr. Lygon, who is foolishly confidential with that spoiled brat, tell her that his telegraph-message was all right, and why did Mr. Berry leave me to imagine they had sent? Now—he does not

want a letter sent to his wife, and he puts a false name on it. That light which Arthur Lygon did not see in her light eyes was the flash of the powder on which the spark had fallen. "They are keeping a secret of some kind from me," said Mrs. Berry's thin lips, inaudibly. "Let me see how long they will keep it."

And it was not with the sweetest expression in her face that she left the room to write her letter, though her high voice became almost caressing as she bade Arthur make haste over his despatch, and she would say everything that was kind for him to Laura.

Into the library hastened Mrs. Berry, for she was a practical woman, and knew where to look for knowledge, which is the next best thing to having knowledge. A Gazetteer was open before her in a minute.

"No such place," she said, again looking at the envelope. "But then it may be a small place, not worth mentioning." You see, she wished for a conclusion, but did not jump at it, which shows that she would never have made a good interpreter of the prophecies.

"Looking out a very gigantic polysyllable for our discomfiture, my dear?" said Mr. Berry, who was at the window. "That's not the dictionary."

"I believe I know a dictionary as well as your self," said his wife, repressing any more tart rejoinder. "But I never know where to find your books. Is there any book here that tells of small

places, not important enough for maps and gazetteers?"

"There's Pigott," said Mr. Berry, "those large red volumes on your left. They mention every hole and corner in the kingdom. What county do you want?"

"Devonshire," said Mrs. Berry.

"Well, you'll see the name on the back," said her husband, as he left the room.

No Long Edgecombe in Herefordshire, nor, though Mrs. Berry took the trouble to go quite through the lists, was there among the Nobility, Gentry, or Clergy, such a name as Lygon had given her.

"They are playing tricks with me," said Mrs. Berry, feeling herself personally wronged, and trying a mental examination of the enemy's position, in order to see what could be done in the way of revenge.

Now, people who call themselves practical will probably say—

"I have no patience with the woman."

Now that is wrong to begin with. We are bound to have patience with everybody, and especially with women.

"I should like to take her by the shoulders and—"

Stop again. That would be rude and coarse. The man who lays his hand upon a woman, save in—For shame! Must a player be called in with a clap-trap, to rebuke your violence?

"And say, 'Why, you meddling, spiteful old fool—'"

Exceptionable language, and one half of it unjust. Mrs. Berry was not five-and-forty, and was no fool.

"'Your husband is a solicitor, and so is taken into people's confidence.'"

Mr. Berry has retired from practice, and has no more right to keep secrets from his wife than any other private gentleman.

"'And what business have you to pry into his affairs?'"

And you call yourself a practical person, and yet think that talking in that way to a shrewd, determined, venemous-minded woman of middle age will deter her from taking a course which I perceive by that recurrent light in her light eyes she intends to take, although at present she has no idea where it will lead her. Well, if it relieves your mind at this period of the history to say that you would like to shake Mrs. Berry by the shoulders, avail yourself of that relief. But be sure that her mind is made up for mischief, and a shake like that of the earthquake of Lisbon will never shake that resolve away from behind those light eyes.

Mrs. Berry took Arthur Lygon's letter from him —it was addressed to a friend in Somerset House, and she would have liked to open it, but there was but one kettle in the house, and that was in the kitchen, where the servants were too busy to be sent away while the lady should hold the letter in the steam. If he had sealed it, I think she would have

kept it back for private examination, but as he had merely fastened it in the ordinary way, she let it go—the rather that as the boy was waiting, it was necessary to give him *one* letter, and she had no immediate intention of parting with Arthur's envelope. If she had performed upon the Somerset House letter the process which it is understood is very largely practised upon the epistolary literature of the time (and certainly the business of masters and mistresses is curiously familiar to their dependents in these days), the lady would have found only a scribbled request to a friend to order the double-sashed windows of the writer's office to be cleaned during his absence. That letter went, the writer and the sender being mutually engaged in tricking each other. In very large machines there are very small wheels, and, mean as they are, the machinist who should leave them out might induce a crash among his grand works. And he who depicts the machine must show the little wheels as well as the rest, though it would be more dignified to draw only the majestic-moving pistons and the fiery fly-wheel.

Dinner passed over very quietly, and such conversation as arose was the result of effort. For Lygon, as may be imagined, was too full of his own great trouble, and was looking forward too eagerly to the revelation which Berry had promised him on the morrow, to have much animation to spare upon dinner-table common-place of the kind that would be acceptable to Mrs. Berry. That lady, whose

wrath did not require nursing to keep it warm—an educated woman's qualifications for making herself detestable being of course superior to those of a Scottish she-peasant—was sufficiently angular, incisive, and observant during the meal, but did not betray any overt hostility to any one. Indeed Clara, who was permitted to join her elders, rather benefited by the situation of affairs, for Mrs. Berry, who would ordinarily, and in pursuance of her favourite tactics, have done the child what discomfort she could in the way of matronly checking, and the withholding anything Clara might be supposed especially to desire, chose to be gracious and even playful with her, and bestowed extra jam with the omelette, and a double libation of cream and sugar with the strawberries. The little girl, however, was not old enough to square the account, and to allow a person whom she instinctively disliked to bribe herself into Clara's good graces, as you and I, being rational people, do. Nay, did, only last week, when you yourself said to me, as we walked down to the Club from old Pinchbeck's, that certainly Pinchbeck was a coarse old beast, and as great an old fool as ever didn't understand a good story, but his dinner was a first-rate one, and the wine out-and-out, and I agreed with you that we would speak to some of the Committee, and try to get him in, if we could. But if we were not wiser than children, where would be the use of growing up?

The evening hung sadly on hand, in spite of the loveliness of the soft summer evening. The four

wandered about the gardens, but no laugh woke the stillness of the place, and even Clara, subdued, laid her hand in her father's, paced silently by his side, and restrained her desire to go and sit on the little tree-bridge, and see the water dance in the moonlight.

Mrs. Berry returned to the house, on hearing that a visitor was in the drawing-room.

When the gentlemen were summoned to tea, they found the mistress of the house and the visitor. This was a somewhat malevolent-looking old lady in spectacles, who emitted a sort of grunt at Clara (as if the latter had done her some wrong in being so young, while the other was so old, a grievance a good deal felt by those who have made an unworthy use of life), and immediately told her to sit down and be quiet, the child having given no offence at all beyond what her presence caused. On a small table lay open a map of Herefordshire.

"This is Aunt Empson, Mr. Lygon. This is Mr. Lygon, aunt dear, who married Laura Vernon, you remember her?"

"I remember her," grunted Aunt Empson. "She's grow'd older than when I know'd her. I hope she's grow'd more steadier."

"Mamma was always steady," was Clara's instant deliverance of reply.

Aunt Empson looked evilly at the speaker, and but that Clara was protected would probably have called her to approach, and then pinched her.

"Quite right to stand up for mamma," said Mr. Lygon, who would himself have liked to say something offensive to the impertinent old woman, but did not see a gentlemanly opening. He was in no mood, by this time, to bear gratuitous annoyance.

"But speaking of mamma," said Mrs. Berry, in a loud and playful voice, "where *is* she? For aunty is a Herefordshire woman, and does not recollect the name of Long Edgcombe, and we can't find it in the map."

"No, really?" said Lygon, with a voice into which he certainly managed to throw an expression of extreme carelessness as to whether they could or could not. "Bad map, I suppose."

"A very good map, on the contrary," said Mrs. Berry.

"Then you don't look close enough, I suppose," returned Mr. Lygon, waxing still more angry at being tormented. "I can see it from here," he said, determined on a bold stroke, and half raising himself on the sofa to give a glance across at the map. "Let Aunt Empson wipe her spectacles, and then she'll see more steadier. Ha! ha!"

It would have been dreadfully rude—was—but consider the provocation, and what Arthur Lygon was thinking of, while the women set upon him. Mrs. Berry was either repulsed, or felt a moment's respect for the enemy. Only a moment's.

"Clara, dear, come here."

Oh, *she* was not going to pinch the child.

"What was the name," she said, taking Clara's hand, "what was the name of the lady whom papa said that mamma was gone to see? Do you remember?"

"Oh yes," said Clara, "I remember it, because it is a funny name. It's like saying you had eaten a cat—it's Mrs. Cateaton."

"So it is," said Mrs. Berry. "I fancied we were wrong, somehow. That was not the name you put on the envelope for me, Mr. Lygon."

"Nonsense," said Arthur Lygon. "I sincerely beg your pardon a thousand times, Mrs. Berry; but the idea of my making a mistake in the name is too absurd."

"I am positive that you wrote something else."

"Not likely," said Mr. Berry, who had a shadow of a suspicion that Arthur might have been doing something to throw the amiable Marion off the scent. "We never make mistakes in Somerset House, Arthur, do we?"

"We never allow them to be mistakes," said the official gentleman.

"Not even when they are put under your eyes?" said Mrs. Berry, suddenly throwing the envelope across to Arthur Lygon, who of course saw, as he knew he should see, "Eatoncamp" upon it.

"So you didn't write," he said, with admirable coolness. "You thought a mother's eagerness to

have a letter could wait another post. Ha! ha! Mrs. Berry. However, it's lucky, as I made that curious muddle of the name. I believe, however, that the letter would have found Mrs. Lygon, just as well."

"So do I," said Mrs. Berry, in a slow, low voice.

CHAPTER VI.

ARCHIBALD VERNON, the father of Mrs. Lygon, was pleasantly settled in Lipthwaite, when Arthur Lygon was introduced to the family in which he found his beautiful wife. Into the circumstances which induced Mr. Vernon to take up his abode in Lipthwaite, it is not necessary at the present time to enter with any minuteness; but in order to preclude any unnecessary suspicion of mystery, it should be explained that Archibald Vernon was one of those persons who conceive themselves to be entirely misunderstood and ill-treated by the world; but whom the world, on the contrary, insists on believing that it understands most thoroughly, and treats most naturally. Originally intended for the bar, young Mr. Vernon had made so many steps in the direction of the woolsack as are comprised in being duly entered for the Great Legal Handicap, and in having his name fairly painted on the door of one of the Gray's Inn stalls in which some of the animals designed for that race undergo preliminary treatment. But he was very soon scratched. A cleverish lad, with a ready pen for endurable verse, and a still readier pencil for smart sketching, with a considerable amount of desultory reading, and a memory for the agreeable portions of such reading, with a fluent

tongue, and much energy of manner, Vernon was held, among his kinsfoik, as a young fellow who would be sure to make his way. *Nil tetigit quod non ornavit,* was classically remarked, at the dinner on his twenty-first birthday, by an enthusiastic godfather who, to do him justice, had shown his faith in the youth's powers by never contributing, otherwise than by the most gracefully expressed wishes, to his advancement in the world. Vernon's own means were very limited, and this circumstance, fortunate indeed in so many thousand cases, might, by compelling him to avoid all the agreeable excursions from the direct road of life, and to pursue its safe and well-beaten track, have made him, in due time, the rising man whom he had been supposed to be. But, unluckily, just at the moment when various and harassing debts of no great amount, and a general sense of discomfort, discouragement, and want of purpose, were forcing the volatile Archibald Vernon into the conviction that he must buckle to honest work, and tramp away at the road in question, regardless of the fields and flowers right and left, that same godfather completed his career of neglected duties by an act of positive wrong to his god-son. The sponsor died, and left Vernon exactly enough, with the aid of his small patrimony, to live upon "like" a gentleman. This sum Vernon made the not uncommon financial error of supposing an amount that enabled him to live "as" a gentleman, and the fatal difference involved in the little words was not revealed unto him until too late. The

Gray's Inn stall was exchanged for handsome chambers, and by the time that these looked as delightfully as possible, that the pictures were finally and tastefully hung, that the pianoforte was in admirable tune, and that the oak and velvet furniture left nothing to be desired except the upholsterer's receipt, the susceptible Archibald discovered that to live as a gentleman meant to live with a lady, who, being his wife, could not be expected to live in chambers. So the pictures, pianoforte, oak and velvet, and Mrs. Vernon, were established in a charming house, not much too large, at Craven Hill. All went delightfully, for Emmeline Vernon was an accomplished musician, and Archibald was just of the calibre of mind that dotes on music, and it was the pleasantest occupation in the world to sit with his pretty wife till two or three in the day, singing duets, or hearing that divine thing of Mozart's, Vernon with his feet in slippers, elegantly worked by his bride, and in a velvet coat that gave the refined-looking man an appearance between that of an artist and of an Italian nobleman as beheld in ancient portraits. The children came with their usual celerity, and it was not until Emmeline grew rather cross and cold about playing Mozart after disagreeable interviews with traders, that Archibald Vernon once more began to think that he really must buckle to work.

But rough buckles are not readily fastened when one's muscles have been neglected. It is not agreeable to dwell on this part of Mr. Vernon's shifty

history. Portions of it, prepared with a good deal of topographical exactness in regard to his various residences, are, I am sorry to say, still on record in the registry of an evilly odorous tribunal in the Rue Portugal. But who would willingly sketch the life of a family in the dispiriting and discreditable transition from comfort to need? Who cares to write or read of forestalled income, of unhonoured cheques, of humiliating obligations, of insincere promises extorted by pressing necessity, of harsh friends and callous creditors, of a wife compelled to make feminine appeals either for aid or for forbearance, and often to make both in vain, of children accustomed to see parents nervous at the knock or ring, to hear servants instructed in lying, and even, under sudden emergency, to utter the excusing or procrastinating falsehood at the bidding of parents, too eager to escape the momentary annoyance to remember the miserable lesson they were teaching? At times Vernon, heartily ashamed of his position, resolved to work himself into a worthier one, registered vows to do so, and walked out determined to do something in fulfilment; but what are a weak man's vows? Any discouragement damped his resolve within an hour of its being made; any temptation drew him away from the feeble scheme he had planned, and he returned home somewhat and deservedly less respectable in his own eyes than he had gone forth. At the same time, it would have been, for a stronger man, a hard fight that could set him right with the world, and we will not judge

the variously talented, versatile, helpless Vernon more severely than he deserves, and that implies no light sentence. His profession he had, of course, abandoned, but he had always delighted to dabble in literature, and in the days of his prosperity his essays were thought to have a sparkle, and his poems a passion, which it is charitable to suppose had dis appeared from them in the days of his adversity, when he found it so difficult to get those merits recognised by paymasters. Still, he did something, and the least motion of a stream long retards its freezing. The small, slight, occasional efforts he made in literature preserved his mind from utter stagnation, and he obtained some, but infrequent remuneration, which aided him in maintaining a certain self-respect, and which confirmed him in the belief that circumstances only, and not his own weakness, had prevented his being one of the recognised leaders of the public mind. Let it be added in his favour, that even amid the daily grievances of his lot—as he termed it—the troubles outside his dwelling, and the troubles within, these last painfully increased by the want of help from a disappointed wife, whose good looks and good temper were deserting her, and who now played Mozart only on lodging-house pianos, and chiefly at times when he would have desired quiet—Archibald Vernon did not seek comfort at the hands of the Bottle Imp. His children never saw him in a condition in which —if he had a laugh to spare—it was not as true and fresh as their own.

I feel that perhaps I am treating him too indulgently, and in the interests of morality and society one ought to use stronger words against a man who was an idle and dishonest citizen, and who was the father of children to whom he did not do his duty. But as Lord North said when he, aware of his being about to resign, had his carriage ready at the House, one wet night, while the Opposition had sent their vehicles away, "See what it is to be in the secret." If it had been my melancholy duty to finish Archibald Vernon's history by saying that he died in the Bench, or emigrated, a broken-hearted man, to Australia (and was poisoned on the voyage by the ignorant surgeon of an emigrant vessel), I would have given him the full benefit of appropriate indignation. But, happening to know that his fortune was going to be re-established, I deem harsh language uncalled for. It is well to be quite sure that a man is quite ruined before you stamp upon him.

But, not to be too civil to the indiscreet, be it said that there was another phase in Archibald Vernon's character. Unable to succeed in the world, he naturally made up his mind that the world was all wrong. And, weaving into something which it would only be trifling with words to call a system, a mixture of the practical warp and the sentimental web, he clothed himself with a garment which thenceforth became coat-of-mail to him against the shafts of vulgar common sense. He coupled the fact that John Brown is starving with cold, and the fact that Lady Clara Vere de Vere's Italian greyhound

has a warm jacket, and with perfect ease deduced the conclusion that we want a revolution. He placed the splendid receipts of the Attorney-General (whom he explained to be the minister of a false and corrupt institution) on one side, and the paltry earnings of a curate ("who, apart from his creed," said Archibald, a sentimental unbeliever, "was labouring to do good, so far as he knew") on the other, and made the portentous balance on the lawyer's side prove incontestibly that pikes were the things to reduce that balance. And it is hardly needful to say, that when in the newspaper which announced the decision of the committee that there was no evidence to connect Sir Lionel Squandercash with the proved bribery at the St. Brelade's election, there also appeared the Bow Street sentence which consigned the squalid Joe Nipps to prison for picking a pocket, Vernon wrote a song with more notes of exclamation than orthodox typography permits, and beginning "Ha! ermined Fiend!" poetically regardless of the circumstance that the police magistrates do not attire themselves in the spotless fur. All this sort of thing is done by many respectable men; some, I am happy to say, would be very much offended, if you thought them weak enough to do it for other than mercantile purposes; but Vernon, so far as he could be said to have a real conviction, believed that the world was a compound of sham, cruelty, and hypocrisy—and he told his children so.

Which paternal instruction might have been less deleterious had it been accompanied with that

teaching by which religious parents make it clear to their offspring that, however bad the world may be, it is decidedly none of our business to make it worse. But Archibald Vernon, like millions of other feeble persons, confounded priests with shrines, and rejected both; and as for poor Mrs. Vernon, her religious views were originally something to the effect that she always felt good in a cathedral when the organ was playing,—and the unfortunate lady, having been rather out of the way of cathedrals during her troubles, had not had much chance of cultivating her piety. She once bought two prayer-books with gilt corners and clasps, for the eldest girls, but a landlady detained one of them, in very small part of a claim for a broken loo-table, and in the other poor Mrs. Vernon put two sovereigns to send over to Archibald when in prison, as she thought the messenger was less likely to steal a parcel than an envelope with money, and the sacred volume was left in 7 in B. No other attempt, beyond an occasional impatient wonder why the girls could not go to church, instead of lying in their beds half Sunday reading novels, was made by Mrs. Vernon in a theological direction. Nor were the poor children more fortunate in a secular point of view. For among Archibald Vernon's sentimentalisms was one to this effect (I think he had stolen it from some German gentleman who was famous for demoralising the minds of his young lady correspondents), namely, that a child's heart was Heaven's flower-garden, and it was blasphemy for man to seek

to lay it out his own way. This delightful aphorism Vernon was fond of quoting, especially when asked whether Beatrice, and Bertha, and Laura did not go to school. But I do not believe that he was entirely sincere in this matter, or that if he had been richer he would not have had good instruction for those three handsome, intelligent, affectionate girls, whom, even in their uncared-for state, it was impossible not to love. He taught them a little himself, and tried to teach them more; but between the comfortless irregularities and the actual troubles of home, and an entire want of support from his wife, who at times was moved even to deride what were praiseworthy efforts by the father, the domestic tutor was not very assiduous, or very successful. The girls grew on, and bloomed, and were loveable, but owed little to any outward or visible system of instruction. Was it ill or well for them, that when Laura, the third, was about twelve, their unhappy, petulant, negligent mother died? Emmeline Vernon was all that—and yet she was their mother, and the scale of frailties must be heavily weighted before it descends against that word. Well, or ill? Perhaps events may aid us in judging.

This, then, was the father of Mrs. Lygon. To complete his story, a few words will suffice. The death of Mrs. Vernon, after a trying illness, made more trying by privations and troubles, and by the unfortunate disposition of the sufferer, was scarcely felt as a blow by her husband, whose nature she had hardened, in no small degree, by her

demonstrative unfitness to share the lot they had risked together. But before the mother was laid in the grave, two of her aunts, who had never forgiven her a marriage with an Atheist, Profligate, and Blasphemer (they were of Clapham, and Clapham has never been accused of inarticulateness), saw that they could properly come forward to the rescue of their niece's children. On the solemn condition that Mr. Vernon should not interfere with the education of the children, or give them any of his infidel books to read, the Misses Judson would make the family a regular allowance, and pay the bills at a day-school. This point, however was attained only by more determined obstinacy than Archibald had been credited with. Nothing—not even the solemn assurance of both the old ladies that his daughters were certainly going, Clapham mentioned where, but I had rather not—would induce him to part with his children, and a compromise was at length effected. He was asked whether he objected to reside in the country, to which he replied in the negative, adding, convincingly, from a pious poet whom it was rather strange that he should know :

"God made the country and man made the town."

The Misses Judson requested him not to be profane during the brief time they should be together, and were rather offended than not on its being shown to them that the line was by Mr. Cowper, who wrote so many Olney Hymns. However, being in the

forgiving way, they forgave this and other matters, or said they did, and, at all events, Mr. Vernon and his daughters were soon afterwards settled at Lipthwaite, one of whose Evangelical ministers was a Christian friend of the old ladies, and Beatrice, Bertha, and Laura were sent to a tolerably good school.

"Now, of instruction as well as of ignorance," says the heathen writer, "there are various kinds."

CHAPTER VII.

With most of the facts mentioned in the preceding pages Mr. Berry was well acquainted, and at such of the minor details in the history of Archibald Vernon and his children as had never come formally before the solicitor, he could have made a shrewd guess. He could have added, had it been necessary for him to enter into matters on which Arthur Lygon was as well informed as himself, that Mr. Vernon's period of residence at Lipthwaite had been about the most creditable portion of his life. Called upon for no active and regular exertion to maintain a household around him, but supplied, at dates which were never anticipated or over-passed, with the means of living respectably, and being, moreover, as he well knew, under the *surveillance* of more than one friend of the ladies of Clapham, Vernon gradually subsided into habits of order and exactness, and even found comfort to the indolence of his nature in departing as little as possible from the clock-work *régime* of life in a small country town. He still preserved his energetic delivery, which rather frightened some of his Lipthwaite acquaintances, and deluded others into the conviction—thoroughly shared by himself—that he was a great man, thrown away; but his

only energy was in his speech, and he would postpone, for the most fragile reasons, the writing the commonest letter of business or courtesy. But he read a good deal, indited many yards of the severest poetical denunciations of society, and perhaps secretly cherished an idea that some day the desired convulsion of that society would take place, when, like Lamartine's, his pen would be found sword and sceptre in the new era. His life was perfectly harmless, and its real poetry, although he knew not that it was so, lay in the admiring affection which he felt for his three pretty daughters, and in their earnest love for their fond and unhelpful father.

He was not living at Lipthwaite at the time at which our narrative begins. A cottage on the Bolk's Hill road, which had been taken for him by the Misses Judson, was within a short walk of the school at which the girls were placed, and during the time of their undergoing the educational process, as understood by Mrs. Spagley and her assistants, Hermit Hut, as he had been pleased to name it, answered the purpose for which it was designed, that of an unpretentious home for a family of very limited means. The poor girls had not, in their earlier life, been surrounded by the comforts which children accept without recognition; and which, supplied by those who love them, leave their young hearts at liberty to devise ornaments and amusements. For far too many a year it had been matter of thankfulness, or perhaps I had better write, of

congratulation, if the day were got through without any particular annoyance, and the meals of the household were not palpably deficient in something usually esteemed a necessary. The ordinary combats with the tradesfolk, and the occasional campaign when millinery wants could be resisted no longer, and dress must be managed somehow, had left poor Beatrice and Bertha very regardless of flowers, birds, embroideries, and pictures, and the thousand and one dainty little signs that mark the habitation of happy girlhood. With Laura the case was somewhat different, as her removal from a scene of strife and penury to one of comparative comfort had taken place at an earlier part of her life, and the child speedily acquired the tastes and sympathies of those of her own age. Beatrice and Bertha clung to their thumbed and sentimental novels, to their shifty ways and general untidiness, while Laura became *rangée,* thoughtful, orderly, and fond of adorning her home as if it were a place to live in, not one meant merely to get through life in. But this difference created no estrangement among the sisters, for whom their common troubles had created perhaps stronger ties than belong to sisterhood—that connection apparently so close, and yet so easily and completely sundered by changed circumstances—and a truer alliance could not have been discovered than existed between Beatrice, Bertha, and Laura Vernon. While they resided at Lipthwaite their intimacy was unbroken, and when both the elder girls married, which they easily did, to the

surprise and indignation of many better-dowered maidens of Lipthwaite, neither husbands nor children, nor that more potent solvent of affection, rivalry in the world, produced alienation of feeling between them. When Laura, at nineteen, succeeded in appropriating to herself the heart and hand of the handsome Arthur Lygon, and was removed to her London home, the loneliness of Lipthwaite became insupportable by her father, and with the assent of the surviving Miss Judson—the elder had departed, bequeathing some kindly evidences that her heart had been less stern than her professions—Vernon again settled in the neighbourhood of London, but this time in a pleasant boarding-house, where he was much admired for his bright eyes and fluency of language, and where he had ample opportunity, at most comfortable dinners and over excellent wine, both costing him nothing, of proving to successions of amused guests that the world was thoroughly wicked, and that all its institutions were utterly detestable.

Thus far went Mr. Berry's information. How much farther may be seen hereafter; but men of his vocation seldom tell all that they know.

Had Mr. Berry ever heard of a scene like this?

It was night—but not far into the night of a cheerless day late in October—when a man, whose rapid movement betokened his youth, forced his way through the carelessly kept hedge at the end of a long garden, in the country, and, pausing for a moment to assure himself that he had caused no

alarm to a powerful house-dog which he knew to be kenneled near the other extremity of the garden, made his way to an arbour, which, but that it was boarded and roofed with thatch, would have been bleak and bare enough that drear and all but wintry night. The feeble rays of a rising moon afforded him uncertain guidance, but he trod as one who well knew his way, for all his stealthy entrance; but he had either the art of a cat-like tread, or was very lightly shod, for his foot paces could scarcely have been heard by a listener.

Yet there was a certain restlessness in his next act—unless it arose from habitual inability to deny himself any enjoyment that occurred to him as desirable.

Feeling his way into the arbour, and taking his seat on a bench, he took out a match and struck it. It flashed and expired, and he muttered, but not angrily, a French oath, and struck a second match, with which he carefully lit a cigarette.

Having finished this without moving, he looked impatiently towards the house, and in an under key rather chanted than sang a vaudeville couplet intimating that though

> "Woman keeps us waiting now,
> She shall wait for us to-morrow."

And after some further manifestations of impatience, the stranger drew from his pocket one of those convenient continental inventions in which candle and candlestick are made to shut up in the smallest

compass, and he lit his taper, placed it before him on a little table, and, taking out a tiny volume, began to read.

A spectator, had there been one, would now have had a good opportunity of observing the person who conducted himself so coolly.

He was, as has been said, young, and well made, and but for the intense and settled paleness of his face, might have been called something more than handsome. There was intellect, of a keen order, though far from the highest, in the delicate features, the somewhat square and closely shaven face, and the lofty forehead, from which he had removed a kind of military cap, thus disclosing what remained to him of shortly cut black hair, smoothly laid, it might seem with a view of exhibiting that fine forehead to the best advantage. The lips were very red, and somewhat compressed, and on the upper one was a small black moustache, an addition to the effect of a face which, though an Englishman's, was Parisian in its finesse. His dark, deeply set eyes glistened in the light of the taper, which also showed, resting on the table, a white small hand, with a glittering ring — the other hand was in a black glove. The stranger's dress, too, was black, and his frock-coat was buttoned at his neck, soldier fashion. But, be it again said, for the pallor of the face, it was one upon which you would at first look with a pleasure, which might not be permanent.

The spectator would have needed to be rapid, however, in his observation, for in a few moments

light and hurrying footsteps were heard, and a hand dashed out the light almost before one could have discerned that a woman's form had passed into the arbour.

Then words were spoken, and the first were of reproach, in an under tone—

"Thoughtless, selfish."

"What, for lighting my poor little candle?" said a calm, clear voice, exceedingly gentle, almost caressing, but for that undercurrent of banter so hateful to woman, whether she be pleased or angry. "And you have dashed to pieces my poor little candle! How cruel in you!"

"Suppose it had been seen," returned the female voice, remonstratingly.

> "He would have thought it was the moon,
> Rising to some sorcerer's tune,
> An hour too soon,"

recited the stranger, with very careful inflexion.

"I am here," said his companion, in a cold voice. "Why are you here, and why have you asked me to come?"

"Pointedly put, but categorical answer is not always easy. However, I will do my best. When is this pleasant marriage?"

"That—that cannot concern you," replied the other, in a troubled voice. "I do not know."

"Your first statement is an error, my dear girl, and the second, pardon me, is a falsehood."

"However much one is in your power, you might

preserve the language of a gentleman," replied the girl, with agitation.

"Why, when deceit, which is unworthy of a lady, is sought to be practised upon me? Why am I to be deprived of the happiness of knowing when my friends are to be made happy?"

"Your friends!"

"Actually said with a shudder—or is it the cold? —the night *is* chilly, and—"

It may have been that he attempted to approach her, and that as if by instinct she eluded him. She stood at the entrance of the arbour, with her hand upon one of the rough posts.

If there had been such an interruption to their talk, he took no notice of it, but asked—

"Is Mr. Vernon in bed?"

"You know that my father never goes to his room until eleven."

"I fancied I had heard that hour from the old church—waiting for you must have made the time seem long."

"Once more, what brings you here?"

"Once more, when is the wedding?"

"I don't know," repeated the girl.

"Strange, that you should not, and that I should!"

"Then why ask?"

"Petulance, my love, within limits, is the most charming privilege of women, but when carried too far, we call it impertinence."

This was said in the most benign way, and it was

singular that it should have produced a passionate reply.

"I did not mean to be impertinent—pray forgive me—but I am ill—and it is very cold—I have no shawl—do not be angry, Ernest."

"I am never angry, and least of all with you. Nor will I detain you long."

"Please speak, and say what you wish. I am in such terror—"

"You need not be. No one ever came to harm for my sake."

"Oh, my God!" was the response, given, it might be, involuntarily.

"A form of dissent from my proposition I take it," he replied; and a listener, if there were one, might well wonder of what the heart was made that could respond, with a sneer, to a sob. "I am sorry that we differ, but we will not quarrel, I think."

"No, no, indeed," said the agitated girl.

"Then let us speak of business. The bridal day is fixed, as I tell you, though you will not tell me so. I cannot allow the joyful occasion to pass without my making some present to the happy pair, giving some sign that I sympathise in their transports."

"For mercy's sake, do not stand and inflict torture."

"Not for the world. I hoped to give pleasure, by showing my entire forgiveness of anything that might have seemed to be to my injury."

"To yours!" said the girl in a low voice.

"Why, yes. Without affecting any profundity of feeling, with which I fear I should not be credited, can a man calmly resign the love of a lovely being, whose attachment to himself—"

"At any risk, I leave you—God help me!—if you speak so."

"Stand *there!*" said the stranger in a hasty tone of command. "So—a moment's thought, and you are rational. I had merely to say that I desire to make the bridal present I speak of. But, as the pupils of Mrs. Spagley are likely to know, the honour of being the writing-master at her distinguished establishment is more remarkable than the amount of his salary. I am sure you understand me."

"You want us to give you more money. O Ernest, how *are* we to get it?"

"I would not insult the intellect of the Misses Vernon by supposing that what they have done before they cannot do again."

"We have really none, and papa has none—what can we do?"

"I thought, pardon me, that Mr. Vernon usually received certain moneys about the 24th. This is the 26th, a point on which I would not dwell, but that yesterday I perceived the postman came towards Bolk's Hill with a registered letter."

"But that is wanted for—for marriage arrangements," said the poor girl. "I cannot talk to you on such things, and you ought not to make me—I mean that—"

"Never mind. I comprehend, and a bride would not willingly be thought a beggar."

"Ernest!" sobbed the girl.

"But I might remind you that, on the eve of a marriage, hearts and purses are open, and a bride has such advantages when she asks a little assistance from friends."

She was silent. Perhaps prostrated in presence of his cruelty and meanness.—Yet do not read a woman's heart too fast, or you may read it very wrongly. He, at all events, did not choose so to interpret her.

"All will be arranged. I feel that it will, and that my bridal present will be worthy of the occasion. On the day after to-morrow my copy of Frankenstein will be returned to me, enriched with notes—the notes representing twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds, Ernest!"

"That will be the amount. You have already seen your amiable way to funds—the sum is a mere detail. I had nothing more to say that need detain you from your warm fire-side—unless, indeed—"

He, in wily fashion, dashed out in the middle of his speech, as if to clasp her—but she was gone.

Ernest Hardwick had the money on the day he had appointed.

Did Mr. Berry know of this meeting, or the circumstances that made it what it was?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE excellent Mrs. Berry had firmly resolved that her husband and his friend should have no further confidential talk that night at least, and that whatever mischief might have been done by the shell which she had so deliberately pitched into the enemy's fortress should not be repaired, until she had endeavoured to follow up the attack. We shall see what became of her resolution.

Clara was speedily directed to go to her room, with a solemn injunction not to forget her prayers, and to put out her candle before getting into bed. The first injunction made the child open her eyes, for it was very needless, but she looked wistfully at her father to obtain a revision of the second.

"Mamma takes her light away," said Arthur.

"Then," said Mrs. Berry, calmly, "there may be many reasons why she should learn to do without such assistance."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Berry, ringing the bell. "Tell Hester to fetch the candle."

"Of course you will give your servants what directions you please, Mr. Berry," said the lady, putting the thin lips together, and assuming her favourite attitude of a wronged wife.

"In my time," said old Mrs. Empson, whom Mrs.

Berry possibly desired to enlist for active service, "in my time gentlemen did not take upon themselves to meddle in such matters."

"Ah," replied Mr. Berry, who with all his forbearance had no idea of foreign troops being levied to fight against him, "but that was such a very long time ago, Aunt Empson, and we have improved the fashions. Or perhaps your memory don't serve you as well as it did. I dare say, now, that poor Mr. Empson had his own way at home."

"Poor Mr. Empson," retorted the incensed old lady, "I don't know what call you have to use such words, Mr. Berry. Mr. Empson may not have chose to squander the money that by rights should have been his wife's in building ginger-bread houses, and buying Brummagem buttons, but he was not so poor as all that comes to."

"As all what comes to, my dear lady?" asked the provoking attorney.

"You needn't talk to me," replied Mrs. Empson, venomously.

"But I think that you were kind enough, Aunt Empson, to begin by talking to me, or rather at me, and my respect for you compels me to answer."

"Mrs. Empson is my aunt, Mr. Berry," said Mrs. Berry, in a toneless voice.

"You needn't take my part, Marion," said the ungrateful recruit. "It is not a bit of snip-snap impertinence, as I would whip that child for using to her betters, that will frighten me."

"But Clara has not spoken," said her father,

angrily, and lighting a candle for the child, he conducted her from the room, with a kind hand upon her shoulder, and consigned her to Hester, who was coming to answer the bell. He then returned to his sofa, in a humour to speak his mind on small provocation, for he was savage that such an idea as that Clara could be beaten for anything should have been put into his child's head.

"Children were not brought up in that way in my time," said Mrs. Empson, with all the pertinacity of a disagreeable old woman.

"By Jove! I should think not," was the instant reply of Mr. Lygon. "To judge by what one sees now, I should think not. As Mr. Berry very well remarks, we have improved the fashions."

"Really," said Mrs. Berry, with a laugh which the others were to accept as playful; "really, Mr. Lygon, absence from your wife does not seem to sweeten your temper. It is so creditable to you as a married man, that we cannot complain of it, and I must add a postscript to my letter, telling Laura how uncomfortable you are when she is away."

"If the gentleman will let his friends know where to write to her," added Aunt Empson.

Mrs. Berry opened a neat little book, but over it she keenly watched the effect of this impertinence. Arthur's legal adviser, however, deemed it time to take up his client's case.

"What, Aunt Empson, do you want to write to Mrs. Lygon? I am sure she will be delighted. Do you recollect what fun we had over one of your

notes last year, and how we were obliged to send for Hester from the kitchen to come and read it, the spelling being more like hers than ours?"

Mrs. Empson's head waggled laterally in token of her excessive anger, but did not supply her with words meet for the occasion. Mr. Berry pursued his revenge.

"What was that one word that beat us all—you remember it, Marion, your memory is so good for little things—something about heavenly wretches?"

"I beg that no such reference may be made to me," said Mrs. Berry, in some little discomposure, for she knew the temper of her relative, and by no means desired to be thought she had amused herself at Mrs. Empson's expense. "I can always read any note my aunt is kind enough to send me, and that you know perfectly well, Mr. Berry."

"No, no," said her husband, pleased at having effected a diversion, "you gave it up, and it was only Hester, at last, that found out that aunt was recommending us to lay up heavenly riches; she was thinking of a text, you know, Arthur, but we elderly people sometimes use wrong words."

"Some elderly people do, certainly," said Mr. Arthur Lygon.

It was a free and gentle passage of arms, but though victory was not decided, it did not seem to rest with the challengers, and therefore their leader deemed it fit to charge in person. She was making up the thin lips for a pleasant speech, when her exasperated recruit broke in, her voice shaky with anger.

"You may be glad enough to take the advice as I sent you, one of these days, Mr. and Mrs. Berry," she said.

"My dear aunt," said Mrs. Berry, now really alarmed (for who knows what confidences women have between one another, and who does not know that, by feminine ethics, a quarrel legally dissolves all obligations to keep old faith), "I must insist that you do not for a moment—"

"I have not come to my years," said Mrs. Empson, "to have the word insist used to me, and most of all by my own niece, whom I have knowd from a child."

"Aunt," entreated Mrs. Berry, more earnestly than it might have been supposed she could speak, "please don't misunderstand *me*."

"I am a stupid old woman, no doubt," persisted Mrs. Empson, "and if I had not knowd it of myself, I should have been made aware of it to-night by these gentlemen, who have both been good enough to set their wits against a woman as is old enough to be the mother of one of them—"

"And the grandmother of another, and that is me, eh, aunt?" said Mr. Berry, laughing. "Come, I am sure you are much too good-hearted a person to take anything seriously that was not meant so. Why, Marion, here, who loves you better than she loves anybody, was as much amused at your funny spelling as the rest of us, and you know that it is impossible for her to feel anything towards you but respect. Don't get angry, but

let us all have a glass of something comfortable together."

This last straw broke the old camel's back. The idea of being treated by her nephew-in-law like one of those old nurses, or common sort of people, who are to be blowd up all through the evening, and then smoothed down with a glass of spirits. Such was the way Mrs. Empson would have put it, if she had still possessed any power of setting forth her wrongs before proceeding to avenge them.

"Person, Mr. Berry—I am a person, I am well aware of that, and the next time this person troubles you with her handwriting or her presence, let me know of it, that is all." And she made, all things considered, rather a vigorous clutch at a black bonnet in a chair near her. At which bonnet—one touch of millinery makes the whole female world kin—Mrs. Berry also darted, and began smoothing the ribbons, and pushing out the curtain with a tender elaboration that was artistically designed to go straight to the heart of her aunt, as were the niece's touch upon the arm of her relative, and soothing words.

"Dearest aunt, if there is one thing in the world to which I may appeal with confidence, it is your feeling as a Christian."

Other persons, who to be sure would know less of Mrs. Empson, might have thought that such an appeal was the one thing in the world that might be lodged with small advantage. But Mrs. Berry

knew something of her aunt and something of human nature.

"I honestly hope, Marion, that I may presume to call myself a Christian, if"—she added, with a furious look at the men—"these gentlemen will not think it is taking too great a liberty."

Arthur's handsome face looked as if he did think the liberty in question was being taken, but Mr. Berry only smiled good-naturedly, and once more rang the bell.

"Don't ring the bell for me," exclaimed the old lady, in renewed wrath, at the idea that the solvents were going to be asked for in order to pacify her.

"On the contrary, I am going to ring for Hester," said Mr. Berry.

"Edward," said Mrs. Berry, who was always very much in earnest indeed when she called her husband by his baptismal name, "I beg that you will prevent a menial from entering this room until my aunt has been perfectly convinced that your ill-placed raillery was only foolish, and not intended disrespectfully."

"How long will the operation take, my dear, as both Arthur and myself would like a tumbler of whiskey toddy?"

"O! aunt, aunt!" cried Mrs. Berry, inspired, and kneeling on a footstool that she might the more compendiously embrace her rather surprised relation, who subsided into the arm-chair under the vigorous assault. "O, aunty, I always said that you were the dearest and kindest being in the world, and you

do indeed show it to forgive such conduct. O, you do indeed!"

Mrs. Empson might, under other circumstances, have explained that she had done nothing at all in the way of forgiveness, but her niece pressed her down into the chair, and sobbed—at all events, sobbed with her shoulders—and youth will be served, as the proverb says. The aged Christian was in no position to explain her feelings.

"Aunt, dear," continued Marion Victrix, pursuing her advantage, and putting the thin lips to the reluctant cheek—never was there such a double mockery of a kiss—"God bless you, and make me only half as good and as kind, and as generous as you are."

"It does not seem much to ask," thought Mr. Arthur Lygon, who was regarding the scene with considerable disfavour, though he was not in a mood to care very much what went on in his presence.

"Begone, Hester," cried Mrs. Berry, impetuously waving away that faithful domestic, the instant she entered.

"Eh!" said Hester, advancing as calmly as if she had received no instructions in an opposite sense. "Is the poor old soul ill? Dear me! Let me fetch her a drop of hot brandy-and-water, m'm."

"Do, Hester," said the implacable Mr. Berry, "and, while you are about it, fetch the spirit decanters, and bring hot and cold water, Hester, tumblers, spoons, and two wine-glasses."

Aunt Empson's struggles to arise were consider-

able, but her niece's resolute repression of them was really a touch of muscular Christianity.

"One true thing has been said to you, dear aunt, one thing that you must and shall believe, and that is, that I respect and esteem you more than anybody in the world. Believe that, dearest aunt. And so does Mr. Berry," she continued, skilfully, "only he has been a little upset to-night by I don't know what bad news, and he has taken rather more wine than is quite good for him, and I am sure you will overlook that."

Now the charge of having taken too much wine is, I need hardly remind my male friends, one of those allegations which place the accused person at the mercy of his lady prosecutor—if mercy were a thing to come into the game at all. The words really have the power of those of Circe, when she ordered her victims to become brutes. More,—for her slaves had deserved their fate by actual drinking, whereas the accusation in question, from the mouth of Lovely Woman in our time, tells better against a sober than an intoxicate being. From the moment of the fatal utterance, words, looks, deeds, all take a new colouring, are bathed in the purple tide. Speak slowly, and, evil man, be told that you cannot get ideas to come or words to flow, and fit them. Speak fast, and the demon of drink is riding brain and tongue. Do not speak at all, and you are stupid with the wine you have taken. Argue, and you are fractious and feverish. Assent, and you are silly, and do not fully comprehend the meaning of the

words addressed to you. Move about the room, and you are restless with the wine, which does not agree with you, and you had better sit down before you break any of the statuettes. Remain tranquilly on the couch, and of course you are crushing and rending the anti-macassar, but you are not in a state to know what you are about. Propose to go to bed, and no doubt it is the best place for you, but if you were in a condition to care for the opinions of others, you might think what the servants would say at your going off to bed at eleven o'clock. Intimate a notion of remaining, and it is only a man who has been rendered reckless by wine that would think of keeping up those poor servants after half-past ten. Smile, and it is a foolish smile, and you had really better take a book. Frown, and perhaps you had better look in the glass, if you can see straight, and then you will know what ridiculous grimaces you are making. Take up a book, and at once be called upon to answer whether people come home to read at that time of night, and also whether you can see the lines distinctly. Lay the book down, and be commended for doing well in not running the risk of soiling and spoiling what can be of no use to you in your present state. Be cool and undemonstrative as usual, and prepare to state what wine men take that makes them savage and sulky. Press the loved one's hand, or lightly touch her silken tress, and meet the pitying, pitiless wonder how many glasses are wanted to make a person so mightily affectionate. Therefore thou art inconsiderate, O

man, if ever thou exposest thyself to that charge from thy virtuous and domestic Circe. Some married men have recommended that the first time it is brought (save in extraordinary lovingness and playfulness), answer be instantly made with the Bright Poker. Of this counsel I presume to judge not. It might be gentler to bribe the enemy, by never going anywhere without her. For she is not altogether adamant, whatever may have been said for the defendant.

But for this kind of attack to be very successful, it is necessary that the combatants should be alone, as a witness on the male side is very much in the way. Upon the present occasion Mr. Berry, who had his weaknesses, one of which was anger when unjustly accused, actually coloured up at this sacrifice of manly dignity at the altar of feminine affection, and was going to say something which might not have acted as oil on the waters. But his witness came suddenly out, and emphatically.

"Quite a mistake, Mrs. Berry, I beg to assure you. Your husband has taken next to nothing, less in fact than I myself have done, and I am anxious to vindicate myself from the charge of having caused any irregularity in a friend's family. Mr. Berry, I am happy to inform you, has *not* taken more wine than is good for him."

We do not believe in evil eyes in England, and therefore, though there are plenty of them about, they do us no harm. Else, the glance which the kneeling Marion bestowed upon the interposing

Lygon might have been more than was good for *him*.

The old lady in the chair made one more effort to rise, but was again put down by a hasty and fervent embrace, and Mrs. Berry arose for battle.

"Mr. Lygon," she said, with a spiteful deliberation, "whatever unhappiness there may be in your own family, I will thank you not to bring any into mine."

"My dear Mrs. Berry," said Arthur, whose nature it was to become composed and wary in the presence of manifest hostility, "how happy I should be to deserve your thanks for anything."

"When a wife," continued the lady, "is endeavouring to find the best excuse she can for a husband's conduct, it does not become a stranger to interfere, and endeavour to keep up irritation."

"Christians are never irritated, Mrs. Berry," said Arthur, calmly.

"There," cried the high voice, varied with croak, of the old lady in the chair. "You see he calls me a wretched heathen to my very face."

"Aunt," said Mrs. Berry, with dignity, "what either of the so-called gentlemen in this room may say at this time must be a matter for pity, not for answer. You, I am sure, will so regard it."

"What, have *I* had too much wine, also?" asked Lygon, with a short laugh. "I did not know it. But if so, is it not a little inhospitable in you, my dear Mrs. Berry, to tell your guest so?"

"It is the right thing to tell the truth," said

Mrs. Berry, as if announcing a newly recognised dogma.

"And not right to do the reverse," said Mr. Berry, roused into real wrath, and manifesting it by bringing his hand down, by no means gently, on the table. "I will have no untruths spoken in my house, about me or about my guests."

"Oh!" said, or rather emitted, Mrs. Berry. Two letters are nothing, but there may be from Alpha to Omega in two letters, and I think the noise made by the lady ran nearly that length in implied taunt and defiance.

"No untruths, to please anybody," returned her husband.

"Perhaps it might have been well, not that I presume to dictate," said Mrs. Berry, slowly, "if that notice had been given a little earlier."

"You hear what I say," replied Mr. Berry, understanding her meaning, but not choosing to do so. "Mrs. Empson knows perfectly well that intentional disrespect to her is out of the question, but I am sorry that she has lived all these years without learning how to take a friendly joke. When she can do so, I shall be as happy as I always am to see her here. You can explain that to her, Marion, without any unworthy subterfuges. Lygon, we will take our tumbler in the library."

He led the younger man from the room. Arthur expected, at each instant, to receive a parting shot, but whether the sudden and very unusual manifestation of her husband's anger had awed Mrs.

Berry, or whether she preferred to defer operations until a more convenient season, the solicitor and his client were allowed to pass without further speech. Then the women made up their differences in a minute, and Hester entering, not empty-handed, they also made something else, after the manner of such ladies.

CHAPTER IX.

THE boat from Folkstone to Boulogne was making excellent progress, the water was what people choose to call "glass," and even the foreigners who were returning from insulation, and who, in spite of the glorious weather, wrapped and shawled themselves, and lay at full length, scowling at the sea as an ally of perfidious Albion, could not manage to get into their faces that curious hue of mottled whitey-brown paper, which is usually discernible on the alien countenance when the alien is on the ocean. There was scarcely a tolerable excuse for the kind tremors and slight faintnesses of the pretty bride, away for her honey month, and affectionately desirous to afford her Algernon the happiness of paying her all the *petits soins* of a voyage. The day was as beautiful on La Manche as at Lipthwaite.

Mrs. Lygon was sitting as far apart as possible from other passengers, but not in that part of the vessel where her place would naturally be. Plainly dressed, and veiled, she occupied a camp-stool "forward," among the humbler class of passengers. She sat by the side of the vessel, and held a book, less for reading than as an assistance in repelling any well-meant attentions from good-natured women, who, happy in their holiday with their families,

pitied her supposed loneliness, and any impertinence from young shopmen and the like, who, "cutting over to Boolone for a lark," might desire to commence it by no end of a flirtation with a deuced pretty-looking Party who was sitting *solus* all alone by herself, until your humble took compassion on her. A little knot of smokers occasionally lounged near her, and chatted, but it is needless to say that no smile at their fun encouraged them to draw round her, and her look and manner were so unmistakeably those of a lady that she escaped all the small molestations which underbred Englishmen, less from viciousness than ill-breeding, have a habit of inflicting on a solitary female traveller. Laura was permitted to remain silent and thoughtful, until addressed by one who had a claim to be heard.

This was Ernest Adair, the Ernest Hardwick of the garden and the arbour at Mr. Vernon's house in Lipthwaite.

He had been slightly, if at all aged or altered, to appearance, by the lapse of the years that had passed since that meeting with Mr. Vernon's daughter. His step was as light and confident, his eye as glittering, his features as pale as ever, but perhaps on a closer regard it might have been seen that the lines were a little harder, and the face somewhat more resolved, though the smile was as ready as ever, and the voice as irritatingly pleasant. His dress, still dark, had a certain military compactness, which was not impaired by the effect of a loose white overcoat of the lightest material, and a stiff

travelling cap, of a more elegant kind than is generally adopted by the Briton, who looks very respectable at home, but manifests extremely wild notions of the picturesque when he adorns himself for foreign conquest.

Ernest Adair had kept himself entirely aloof from Mrs. Lygon, since the vessel had left harbour. After providing her with a seat, and placing a book in her hand, he had gone further forward, and establishing himself in the narrowest part of the boat, with his back to the bowsprit, he had devoted himself to his favourite cigarettes, but always keeping a careful watch upon Laura.

Once she drew out a pencil, and a note, and seemed about to write. At that moment Adair's watchfulness was redoubled, and, as a passenger, walking the deck, accidentally paused and screened Laura from his view, his lips compressed with sudden anger. But the next moment the passenger passed on, and Laura's pencil had not touched the paper. Apparently, she abandoned her idea of writing, and returned the pencil to a very small pocket at her waist.

"What an objectionable place to put a pocket," said Ernest Adair to himself. "I shall have to ask her for that pencil, and to fabricate a false pretence for doing so, an immorality which I hereby transfer to the account of her sinful milliner."

Half an hour later, he approached her, bringing with him a little black *sac-de-nuit*, glistening with newness.

"Merely a word or two," he said, respectfully—almost deferentially.

Mrs. Lygon looked up for a moment, but made no reply.

"I have not intruded conversation upon you," he said, in the same tone. "I have scarcely spoken twenty words to you since yesterday afternoon, and those only from necessity. But we shall land in a quarter of an hour, and it may be better to speak here than elsewhere."

Laura listened, but did not answer.

"You have been in Boulogne before," he said.

"Yes."

"Nay, I was not asking a question. I know that you have, and that you are well acquainted with the neighbourhood. At this moment you are troubled at the thought of the crowd on the pier, and the eyes of the people who watch the disembarkation. Have no fear on that account. I have arranged for your being spared all annoyance."

"How?"

"When we approach the harbour, have the kindness to go down into the fore cabin, and do not come up again until I let you know that it is time to do so."

"When will that be?"

"When all the passengers have landed and passed the *douane*, and crowd, touters, and everybody are gone."

"I thought that the police—"

"The police are good enough to waive rules in

my case," said Ernest Adair, with the slightest symptom of return to his old manner. But he at once resumed his respectful tone.

"A carriage shall be ready on the quay, and we shall be out of the town in a few minutes."

"And where next?"

"That will entirely depend upon yourself at the expiration of a short interview between us at a house well known to yourself—a most respectable house, I should have said, but that Mrs. Lygon could not by possibility know any other."

"I will go down at once," she said, rising from her seat.

"If you please. Only one thing more. You left —this agreeable journey was undertaken somewhat hastily, and though delightful as all improvised pleasures are, hurry has its inconveniences—so against one of them, the entire absence of luggage, I have ventured to provide, and this little bag will supply any temporary wants. My own inexperience in such matters has been assisted by more competent judgment."

He took the book gently from her hand, and placed it in the handle of the small *sac*.

"By the way," he said, "I must give my name in writing to the police, that it may not be blundered. I have no pencil; you have one. Favour me with it for a few moments."

Mrs. Lygon mechanically complied; her mind was, at the instant, in another direction, or she might not have done so.

"I will write it in the chief cabin," he said. "We are nearing port—perhaps the sooner you go down the better."

Having the pencil, he did not fear to hasten away.

Her next act was one that might have befitted Laura Vernon better than the matured Laura Lygon, schooled in self-restraint, and habituated to the calm manners of the world.

With a look of anger that could have been seen through the veil she wore, Mrs. Lygon dashed the bag across the vessel's side into the sea—watched it for an instant as it sank—and hurried down the stairs of the cabin.

Ernest Adair was as good as his word. Mrs. Lygon was left undisturbed in possession of the fore cabin until the last of the wild cries, and shouts, and howls, with which a steam-boat is emptied at a French port, was silenced, and the vessel was finally moored in waiting for her next trip. A few minutes later, and a *gendarme* descended, and with the utmost politeness apprised Madame that her carriage awaited her. Whatever question of police had required answer had evidently been met satisfactorily by Adair, for the single duty which the officer permitted himself was the handing Mrs. Lygon to the quay, where Ernest stood holding the door of a close carriage. She entered it without touching the offered hand of Adair, and was somewhat surprised that he immediately closed the door, and mounted beside the driver, who instantly set his horses in

motion. Perhaps, also, she remarked that the vigilant Adair made no inquiry after the *sac-de-nuit*, which he might have supposed she had forgotten. But Ernest had seen the action which consigned it to the sea, and believed that he appreciated all the impulse which had induced her to send it thither, a belief in which he was mistaken, as a man of evil morals, no matter how subtle may be his mind, very frequently is, when seeking to solve the delicate problem called a woman's heart.

CHAPTER X.

ARTHUR LYGON rose early on the following morning, and indeed some considerable time before the hour at which his host and hostess were usually in the habit of making their appearance, and after a glance into the little room in which Clara was sleeping the still calm sleep of childhood, he went out into the garden. Perhaps he hoped that Mr. Berry would join him, and by communicating at once the old solicitor's view of the case, would leave his friend free to take some decided course of action, which Lygon now began to feel was absolutely necessary to his own existence. But he could see that the curtains of Mr. Berry's dressing-room window remained closed, and Arthur, feverish, impatient, irritable, wandered around the garden, and felt more despondent than he had hitherto permitted himself to be.

At a turn of one of the walks Mrs. Berry suddenly confronted him.

This apparition would not have been pleasing to the most indifferent spectator, for Mrs. Berry's loose dust-coloured morning gown, ugly slippers, and favourite hat did not compose an agreeable picture, but to Arthur Lygon the presence of Mrs. Berry was at that moment more objectionable than that of

any created being could have been. His hat, of course, rose mechanically in greeting to his hostess, but it would have been difficult to render his "Good morning," less like the cordial expression of a guest thankful for hospitality.

But to his surprise, and not much to the increase of his content, Mrs. Berry came up to him with a smile that was almost affectionate, and placed her hand in his, which she detained in a friendlier clasp than she was often in the habit of according.

"I am glad to have an opportunity of speaking to you, dear Mr. Lygon, before Mr. Berry comes down. I hope you heard me say good night to you, as I went up stairs last night. I would not come in, for gentlemen do not like to be disturbed when they get into close chat."

Nothing could be kinder than her words, and her manner was as friendly as she could possibly make it. Arthur Lygon, however, could not help contrasting their meeting with their parting over-night, and scarcely knew whether he ought to be apologetic, or only reserved. His companion left him little time for reflection.

"First of all," she continued, "I want to say a word to you from poor dear aunty, who fears she gave you offence by her oddity of talk, and charged me with all kinds of explanations to you. If you knew her as well as we do, and what she has suffered and still has to suffer, you would soon forgive her anything that seemed like petulance, but I am

sure you will take it from me that the poor old lady had no intention to be unkind."

"On the contrary, Mrs. Berry, said Lygon, "I fear Mrs. Empson may have reason to think that I was not so forbearing as I ought to have been, and except that I was anything but well, and——"

"Not a syllable of apology from *you*," said Mrs. Berry, in a low compassionating tone. "Give aunt, give me credit for being able to lay aside any thought of ourselves under such circumstances."

Arthur Lygon looked at her with a keen glance. and was answered by the hand being again placed in his, with a warm pressure.

"Please," said Mrs. Berry, "come with me to the book-room. We shall not be disturbed there."

Lygon, a good deal surprised, could only assent, and follow his hostess into the house.

They entered the library, and Mrs. Berry signing to Arthur to take a chair, closed the door, and actually drew a small brass bolt with which her husband was in the habit of occasionally securing his afternoon reading, or nap, from interruption.

If Arthur Lygon's mind had at that moment been in any condition to receive a ludicrous impression—or a smile could have arisen to his lips at so determined an enforcement of an assignation—smile and impression would have instantly vanished at his companion's next act.

She pushed a footstool towards the table, glanced at Arthur as if to intimate that he well knew what to do, and taking up a large prayer-book, she knelt

down at a chair, and deliberately read out, in a very excellent manner, the sacramental prayer for the church-militant here on earth, laying especial emphasis on the beautiful petition for succour to those who in this transitory life are in trouble or adversity.

At the first moment of her commencing the prayer, Lygon formed a sort of idea that his hostess was merely performing what might be a substitute for family worship as practised in religious families, and at which it might not be Mr. Berry's habit to assist. This idea was of course quickly dispelled. Mrs. Berry might not be able to induce her husband to join in such a rite, but she was mistress in her own house, and would naturally require the attendance of her servants. Then came the emphatic delivery of the portion we have alluded to, and Lygon felt that he was present at a special service connected with himself. He hastily accused Mr. Berry of having either gratuitously revealed the secret in his charge, or of having surrendered it as a peace-offering after the scene of the previous night. He had not obeyed his hostess's intimation that he should kneel, but he remained standing until she had concluded, and then it was with a heightened colour and a rapidly beating pulse that he awaited her next proceeding.

This was to replace the broad red ribbon with which the page in the prayer-book had been marked, and to restore the book itself to the shelf whence it had been taken. Mrs. Berry then came up to

Arthur, as he stood by the fire-place, and looking him kindly in the face, said,

"Now, dear friend, we understand one another."

"Yes," said Lygon, with some presence of mind. "And now any little unkindness of language last night is forgotten for ever. What a lovely morning again," he added, walking to the window and opening it.

Mrs. Berry stepped rapidly to his side.

"Nay, Arthur—you must let me call you so, when in trouble, at all events—this is not well. I will not say that in this world it is not sometimes a duty to avoid intruding one's sorrows upon others, and though we are enjoined to bear one another's burdens, we are not always required to impose our own. But if friendship, Christian friendship, means anything, it means that we are to seek counsel and comfort one of another. You came hither for that purpose; do not be afraid to carry it out. You will find no cold hearts here, in the hour of your sorrow, Arthur."

"I am grateful, Mrs. Berry, for kindness supposed to be needful to me," said Lygon, still desirous to hold out, and in his soul reviling Mr. Berry for not being present to make him aware how much and how little had been revealed, "and if——"

"I will *not* have you say that for which you will reproach yourself hereafter," said Mrs. Berry, earnestly. "If I have not hitherto had your confidence, it is perhaps because I am not one of those who seek a trust not willingly given, and perhaps

too, and very naturally, because my husband has been your friend for so many more years than myself; but this is not a time for worldly etiquette, or indeed for worldly feeling. You may trust me as a friend, Arthur."

"And I am most grateful for your friendship, Mrs. Berry," said Lygon, struggling between discordant emotions.

"If that is from your heart, I am satisfied," said his companion, "and I hope and believe that it is. Poor darling little Clara!"

And Mrs. Berry hid her eyes in her handkerchief, and sobbed.

"He *must* have told her," said Arthur to himself, for the words touching upon a chord on which he had himself been harping throughout another miserable night, went straight to his heart. But again he rallied, aided by his instinctive dislike of the woman beside him, and resolved to resist her as long as he could.

"Have you seen her this morning?" he asked. "Does she not look lovely in her sleep, with all that dark hair about her young face?"

"I would not disturb her," said Mrs. Berry, wiping her eyes. "To think what she may have to undergo, poor baby," and again she wept.

"Not much, I trust," said Arthur, determinately, and thinking, justly, how true and strong a friend and protector Clara had in himself.

"As for any plans for that dear child," said Mrs. Berry, "they must, of course, be the subject of deep

consideration, and for myself, I will say, of prayerful consideration, but they are not, perhaps, immediately necessary. But as regards Mrs. Lygon——"

Laura's name and fame in Mrs. Berry's keeping! The thought passing through Arthur's mind caused a shudder like that given by the first wound from the surgeon's steel. In a forced voice, he said,

"I have arranged with Berry for a conversation by-and-by. It will, perhaps, be better not to speak upon this subject in the meantime."

"You are quite right, quite right," said Mrs. Berry, "and it was with no intention of increasing your trouble that I have endeavoured to prepare you for that conversation by the best means in our power"—a glance at the place where she had knelt explained her meaning. "And if you hear that which may wound your very heart to its depths, you will remember, dear Arthur, where I would guide you for healing."

He turned upon her with irrepressible emotion.

"What should I hear," he said, "that can give me such a wound?"

"Nay," said Mrs. Berry, sorrowfully, "sterner lips than mine must tell you. I cannot undertake a task above my poor strength."

"Do not fear to speak plainly to me," said Arthur Lygon, suddenly forgetting his desire to postpone the conversation, and overmastered by his eagerness to snatch at the key of the mystery that was torturing him; "what I may have done, I can bear to hear."

"*You*, my poor Arthur!" repeated Mrs. Berry, in a tone between surprise and compassion. "If there is anything to lay at your charge, I, at least, know nothing of it."

"To my charge?" said Lygon, impetuously. "He has said so—or if not to my charge, there is something to be told of me—but we will speak of it presently—I would rather not talk now, if you please, Mrs. Berry," he said, hurriedly, "and yet—yes—the sooner the better—if you can light up this strange mystery, do so, and pardon my abruptness."

"Pardon, never ask pardon of me," said Mrs. Berry, "but take this comfort to yourself, Arthur, that this sorrow is none of your causing, except in the sense in which we have all deserved affliction. There is not a word to be said against you so far as I have ever heard."

"Then for what am I to prepare myself—what is this wound you speak of?" he said vehemently. "Ah! forgive me. I perceive that you have as much to learn as myself. Mr. Berry has not taken you into further confidence than he has given to me. Pardon my excitement. I have been exceedingly ill, and my nerves are not steady. I must try a course of walks in your Lipthwaite air, and see what that will do for me."

"Arthur Lygon," said Mrs. Berry, "it is impossible for me, with any poor words I may possess, to tell you how my heart bleeds for you. What you have just said about Mr. Berry, and about his withholding confidence from me is, I grieve to assure

you, utterly beside the mark. All else that I would say to you, dear friend, is that you must nerve yourself to learn, not from me, but from my husband, that which will grieve you to the soul. But if, through his worldly, or shall I say his professional notion of a kindness, which unhappily will be a mistaken one, he should deem it right not to lay the whole truth before you——"

"You intend to do so?"

"Grievous, bitterly grievous, dear Arthur, as such a duty would be, and much as I hope that I shall not be called upon to perform it, I feel that from it, if it must be done, I ought not to shrink."

"Mr. Berry has confided to you, Mrs. Berry, the circumstances that have brought me to Lipthwaite?" asked Lygon, agitated.

"I have learned your sorrow from Mr. Berry's lips," said his companion, slowly, and then she touched his hand in sympathy.

"Ah, he is in the garden," said Lygon, perceiving his friend. "I must speak to him on the instant." And he hastened to the door.

"A moment," said Mrs. Berry, with her hand at the bolt. "Listen to me."

"I am listening."

"You know my husband's true friendship for you."

"I have known it for years. I am here because I know it," said Lygon impatiently.

"That is right, that is well. You have trusted him fully?"

"Fully."

"Do not hurry. A minute more or less is not of importance, and I am speaking for your good, believe me, I am. Go into the garden, and have your interview. I am only too thankful that I have not to be present at it. But remember what I have said of his possible reserve."

"He will have none from me, I hope and believe, or, I repeat it, I would not be here."

"Of all persons in the world, Arthur, I am the last who would cast a doubt upon his earnestness to serve you. But while I believe that truth and straightforwardness are not only the commanded ways of serving a friend, but the best and kindest, my husband has some of the ways of his old calling —all I would say is that I do not think he is prepared to tell you all that you should know."

"Why do you say this to me?"

"Because it is right to say it. I have no sentimental reasons to give you, Arthur Lygon. I profess no ardent love for those of whom I know but little—*now*—and if my heart has warmed to your child, it is for her own sake, not that of others. But you shall not be deceived, if I can prevent it. Go to my husband—hear what he has to say to you, and I, when we meet, shall know, without any words from you, whether he has been candid. If not——"

"You will be."

"Again, I say, from the bottom of my heart, may I be spared the necessity! But do not manifest to him any conviction that he is not telling you the

truth. Go, and may you be strengthened for your trial, my poor Arthur!"

She released him, and in a few moments he had joined Mr. Berry. She saw them shake hands, and turn towards the little wooden bridge over the boundary stream.

CHAPTER XI.

But concealment or reserve, where he professed to give faith and heart, were not in Arthur Lygon's nature, and he resolved, whether his friend had or had not adhered to their compact, that Mr. Berry should have no right to complain of withheld confidence.

"I have been speaking with Mrs. Berry in the library," said Lygon; and then paused to give Mr. Berry the opportunity of placing himself so far right as he could do by explaining that he had thought it best to take his wife into the secret.

"Ah," said Mr. Berry, "that is well. You have smoothed over any little irritation from last night."

"That was instantly put out of the way," replied Lygon, "as you must be sure it would," he added, warmly. "And now, my dear Berry, speak out, and speak quickly. I am manned for anything but suspense. There is something I am to hear, which I am told you will hardly dare to tell me. You should have dared to do so yesterday; but now, in a word, tell me."

He nerved himself, as—once more to borrow comparison from the surgeon's art—the blindfold patient sets himself to receive the steel. But the stroke did not come.

"Arthur," said Mr. Berry, in a troubled voice, "are you repeating my wife's words?"

"Their meaning, at least," said the younger man. "You would expect to hear them. Now, then, for the truth."

"Mrs. Berry has given you to understand that I have a painful secret which you ought to hear, and which I may be reluctant to disclose."

"Yes, yes. But no more preliminaries. I tell you that I can bear it."

"There is no such secret, Arthur."

"This denial, too, I was told to expect. Berry, you have proved yourself my friend too often for me to doubt you. It is only that you think I am too cowardly to hear bad news. I am no coward, and I am ready for the worst. In Heaven's name, speak!"

"And as Heaven is my judge, Arthur Lygon," said the old man, earnestly, "I have no such secret to reveal."

"You had yesterday," said Lygon, almost fiercely. "You told me that there was something in my past life that bore upon the disappearance of my wife. I knew not how to believe that; but I trust your word as I would have trusted my father's. Berry, you are paltering with me, out of kindness—that must end now. Tell me the truth."

"What I said yesterday, Arthur," replied Mr. Berry, "was said upon the spur of the moment, and when you pressed me for some help to your own mind. It was based upon something that occurred to me as possible, but which, upon reviewing it calmly, I

perceive must have been an utterly foolish fancy. I will tell it you, or not, as you please: it is not worth a moment's serious thought. But it gave us time for reflection—"

"And you for consultation with Mrs. Berry."

"Arthur, do you mean upon your affairs?"

"Mrs. Berry has just told me so. I am not complaining—but I would have given the world that you had not done so."

"And I have not done so," said Mr. Berry, with dignity, and speaking in the undertone in which a man of advanced age, indignant, and conscious that he is in the right, usually replies to an accusation.

"What am I to think?" said Lygon. "It is not half an hour since I received Mrs. Berry's solemn assurance that she had learned my sorrow from your own lips."

Berry's face grew ashy white, and his lips quivered.

"Arthur," he said, "spare me words on this; spare me the pain of saying what a husband is loth to say. But believe two things: first, that I have not spoken a syllable to Mrs. Berry on your affairs; and secondly, that I have no secret of any kind to impart. You have known me from your childhood."

There was something pathetic in the appeal of the old man to be saved from the humiliation of accusing his wife of falsehood. But Arthur Lygon was by this time wrought to a pitch of excitement that deprived him of sensitiveness to the emotion of another.

"Berry," he said, sternly, "I would not willingly

wrong you by word or deed, but my own position is too terribly painful to allow me to waste time on a mere matter of delicacy. It is evident that you and Mrs. Berry, or one of you, know that which I ought to know, and that you disagree as to the fitness of letting me hear the truth. If I am not to hear it from you, Mrs. Berry permits me to ask it of her, but deprecates the being compelled to reveal it. *You* force that painful duty upon her."

"Mr. Lygon," said the old man, "at whatever cost of feeling, we will at once give you the satisfaction you require."

"Is that the way to put it, Berry?" said Arthur, hurt at his old friend's tone, but too much agitated to pause and remonstrate. "I am offered the confidence which you seem to wish to deny me."

"Let us go to Mrs. Berry," was her husband's only answer.

And as if she had foreseen the result of their conference, or had been watching it, Mrs. Berry came from the house to meet them on their way. There was just distance enough to be crossed to leave each party time to consider how the conversation should begin, but Arthur Lygon, as most impatient, was naturally most prompt, when they met.

"May I recal to you, Mrs. Berry, the conversation we had, a short time ago, in the library?"

"I expected to have it recalled," was the reply.

"Before which, Marion," said Mr. Berry, with severity, "you will have the kindness to disabuse

Mr. Lygon, before my face, of a mistake which he has founded upon some words of yours."

"It is my misfortune if I express myself inadequately," said Mrs. Berry, with something of her manner of over-night—a manner which she had discarded during her interview with Lygon. In truth, at this instant, though she came to do that which it was near her heart to do, she felt more nervous than was her custom, and took refuge in her artificial defences.

"Mr. Lygon, Marion, came down here upon a painful errand. Be good enough to assure him that you now hear this, for the first time, from me."

"I cannot state a falsehood, Edward, even to please you. My duty to you is solemn, but I owe a still higher duty."

"Dare you assert," said Mr. Berry, "that I told you why Arthur Lygon was here?" And his tone evinced a concentrated anger which his wife had never seen him manifest during all the years of their union. She would have trembled, perhaps, but had that to say which sustained her.

"I made no such assertion," she answered, "nor will Mr. Lygon allege that I made it. What I said I am prepared to justify, if justification is required of me; but it appears to me, and if a woman's feelings lead me astray I cannot help it, that we are wasting time over a comparatively insignificant question, and neglecting a very important one."

"Marion," said her husband, "you do not see, or you will not see, that I am accused of violating a

confidence reposed in me by a friend and a client; yet you dare to speak of the charge as an unimportant one."

"Edward!" said Mrs. Berry, almost passionately, "that you should think of a mere quarrel of words when Arthur Lygon is waiting to hear a revelation that so deeply affects his happiness and his home! I know that he is waiting for it. I know that you have not had the courage to make it. Is it worthy of you, is it kind to him, to say nothing of so insignificant a person as myself, that he should come here for counsel, and should have it kept from him?"

"Is this madness?" said Mr. Berry, in apparent bewilderment.

"No," said Mrs. Berry, "this is not madness. The madness was some years ago, when two friends of Mr. Arthur Lygon's—they stand, I shame to say, upon this grass plot—allowed him to enter into the most sacred relation of life without apprising him of things within their knowledge. If one of those two friends is self-forgiven the other is not, and never will be."

Arthur Lygon could but turn from one face to the other, in his bewilderment. Mrs. Berry's countenance was as pale as woman's could well be, and she seemed prostrated by the weight of the revelation she was endeavouring to make. Mr. Berry's face had assumed a certain appearance of terror which Arthur Lygon had neither will nor leisure to analyse.

"What is your dearest wish at this instant, Arthur?" she asked suddenly.

"To discover her—can you ask?" was his equally rapid reply.

Oh the light that gleamed once more in those light eyes! It could not have escaped either of the spectators. It did not. But each had his own excitement, and had no leisure to heed hers. Nor could either, if possessing the finest ear ever bestowed, have caught that low hiss that followed, and the woman herself could not have certified whether two words were spoken or only thought.

"So, eloped!"

But all this took but a second, and Mrs. Berry was instant in answer:

"Let Mr. Berry give you his clue."

"This malice is actually criminal!" exclaimed Mr. Berry. He would have given anything to recal the word the moment after it had been said. It was the enemy's prize.

"Malice! No, no," said Mrs. Berry, mournfully. "That is not the word to apply, though you have always insisted, Edward, on wronging me in connection with the unhappy history. I have never had any malice. If I had borne any, which Heaven forbid, I might have induced you to make better use of the knowledge you possessed, before it was too late. But if Arthur is bent upon discovering what has been—what has become——"

Feeling her way very carefully, and with slow utterance, even in the hour of victory.

"Of his wife," said Arthur, "and why she left

his home. Speak out, Mrs. Berry—it is no time to pick words."

Oh how her heart beat then! She had the whole key.

"Then, Arthur," she said, "it is better that such a story should be told by a man than by a woman. Let Mr. Berry tell you what he knows."

CHAPTER XII.

"SILENCE, Marion!" said her husband, with the full power of his voice.

"I am ordered to be silent, and I obey," said Mrs. Berry, "but——"

"But by the God that made me, I will be played with no longer," cried Arthur Lygon, maddened beyond self-restraint. "I will have an answer, here, here! You have some dark secret affecting the character of my wife. I will have it before I stir from this spot."

"It is not I who withhold it," said Mrs. Berry, in a voice of mournfulness—almost of sweetness.

"It is then you, Berry," said Lygon, turning to his friend. "Do you keep this thing from me?"

"Arthur Lygon," said Mr. Berry, taking both the hands of his friend in his own. "Listen. If you are now untrue to yourself, if you, in a maddened impulse, force from our lips a story, which, as there is a Heaven above us, there is no need that you should know, the consequences be on your own head. Stay. I have said our lips. I close my wife's now and always, with the solemn declaration that if that story comes to your knowledge, except through myself——"

"No need of threats," said Mrs. Berry. "I

know my duty. The story *shall* come through yourself, if at all. But I utterly deny that Mr. Lygon ought not to hear it."

"Yet Mr. Berry has this instant declared in the most solemn manner that it does not affect me," replied Arthur. "This contradiction makes it more plain than ever that there is a mystery between us, and my course is clear. Berry, at whatever sacrifice of your own feelings, and at whatever risk of the consequences you darkly hint at, I demand to know all, and I ask of Mrs. Berry to remain and bear witness whether you tell me all."

"I once more beg you to forego your demand," said Mr. Berry, earnestly.

"I will not forego it," replied Arthur, sternly.

"And you are right," murmured Mrs. Berry.

"Enough," said Mr. Berry. "If I did not feel that our friendship forbids my longer resisting your appeal, I would still oppose what I again declare to be a folly, to which you are urged, Arthur, by one who should have been a better friend than she has proved to-day."

"My own conscience supplies my vindication," said Mrs. Berry, in answer to the words and to the look that accompanied them. "It is there that I am accustomed to turn for guidance."

"Arthur," said her husband, with the manner of a man who, having resolved on making a communication, desires that it should be thoroughly understood, "follow me in what I may say, and answer what I may ask. Also, reserve all comment until I

have done, and then ask what you will. Above all, believe that, as I have yielded, I make you no half confidence, and therefore do you attach no further or worse meaning to anything I say than the words ought to bear."

"I will not."

"It seems idle to ask you, Arthur, whether you recollect the circumstances attendant on your marriage, but I must recal them for a moment. Your acquaintance with the admirable and excellent young lady who is now your wife" (and Mr. Berry spoke the words of praise with marked emphasis) "was not a very long one. Your first meeting, I believe, took place at——"

"At a party—a sort of pic-nic party, in those grounds yonder," said Arthur, pointing towards the abbey. "It was on a fifteenth of May, my birthday; I have forgotten nothing. Go on."

"And you married in the November following?"

"But I stayed for six weeks of that summer at the Barbel, and for nearly two months more in your house in the town, to which you were kind enough to make me remove."

"That answer means that you had ample opportunity of becoming well acquainted with the character and disposition of Miss Vernon, and that yours was no hasty marriage. I had no such imputation in my mind. You also became well acquainted with part of the family of your intended wife."

"With her father, and with her sister Beatrice, who had married Mr. Hawkesley, and with Charles

Hawkesley himself, who, you know, was the means of my knowing the family."

"But there was another person whom you did not meet until after your marriage?"

"You mean her sister Bertha."

"Who had married two years before you came to Lipthwaite."

"And was then living in Paris with her husband, Mr. Urquhart."

"But you soon after became acquainted with the Urquharts?"

"We called on them in the Avenue de Versailles, when I took Laura for her first visit to Paris, after Clara was born."

"Did you become intimate?"

"Certainly not. I was not pleased with Mrs. Urquhart,—that is to say, she had become too much of a Frenchwoman of the type I hate, but this would not have prevented my behaving with cordiality towards Laura's sister, if Laura had desired it, and circumstances had not come in the way. But something—yes, it was a death in his family postponed the dinner to which we were, of course, invited, and our stay being short, another call was all that took place in the way of intercourse. Mr. Urquhart had been summoned to Prussia on some engineering business, and I did not then see him again. When we were next in Paris, the house was shut up, Bertha and her husband having gone into the country."

"Have you often met them since?"

"Once at the railway hotel, when they were on their way to Scotland, and we were together for a very short time—Laura was ill, and could not accompany me. And I once met Urquhart afterwards, at a scientific association, when he told me that his wife was at Boulogne. I believe those are the only occasions on which we have met, so you see there is no intimacy at all."

"Do the sisters correspond, to your knowledge?"

"Why do you say 'to my knowledge?'"

"Do not be annoyed at my putting any questions in my own way."

"I need hardly tell you that I should never think of asking my wife any question about her correspondence, but I don't suppose she receives letters which she does not mention to me, if they are worth mentioning at all. Do you imply that she would have letters from Bertha and conceal them from me?"

"You know how I love and honour your wife, Arthur, and yet I am bound to say that I think it not impossible that she may do so—or may have done so."

"In that case she would act—though, I own, not as I might wish, for I think implicit confidence the most sensible thing between married people—she would act, I am certain, on a reason that would be perfectly satisfactory. Sisters who have been intimate from childhood may say a hundred things to one another which have no meaning for the eye of a third person, and assuredly I should never ask to

see one of their letters that was not voluntarily shown to me."

"But if the fact of Mrs. Lygon having received such letters were studiously withheld from you?" persisted Mr. Berry.

Arthur Lygon's face darkened with displeasure.

"You are now making a charge of insincerity—nay, of deceit," said he, "against Laura, who is perfectly incapable of either."

"I begged you, and you promised, to forbear from remarks."

"Well, go on."

"Suppose for present purposes, that such *had* been the case," said Mr. Berry.

"Why," said Lygon, impatiently, "even if I were to suppose such a thing, I don't know how it could well be possible. Our letters arrive before I leave in the morning; they are all laid on the breakfast-table, and I am always down, and reading my paper, before Laura is dressed. I should see anything with a foreign postmark, but I am ashamed to discuss anything that implies deceit in her."

"You are not asked to discuss anything," returned Mr. Berry, coldly, "but to answer questions drawn upon you by yourself. As for a husband's knowing what letters his wife receives, if she desire to conceal them, the idea is childish."

"Not when the wife is like mine."

"I am an old lawyer, and have had forty years' experience of men and women, and therefore, if I

say what sounds harsh, you may take it as the result of experience, and not as any suggestion against anybody in particular. Letters not received secretly! You were yourself a gay man once and might remember that such things are."

"I don't like your tone and manner, Berry, but I have promised to hear you to the end," said Arthur, haughtily. *His* tone and manner served only to increase the old man's pertinacity.

"*Tu l'as voulu,*" he said. "Why, Lygon, cannot a correspondent be told so to post letters that they may be delivered at a time when the husband will be out? Or, as he never opens a letter of his wife's, can she not toss across to him, as the contents of an envelope, a harmless letter that was never in it at all? Or cannot the letter be harmless enough, while the postscript is on a separate paper, and not producible — and not produced? Or cannot the letter be sent to or through a convenient lady-friend; or, better still, one who is unconscious that she is aiding in a trick?"

"Mr. Berry," said Arthur, in a rage, "you may spare yourself the trouble of proving to me that you have read a great many French plays, but when you are speaking of ——"

"Of Mrs. Urquhart, who, living in Paris, must have seen a great many French plays," said Mr. Berry; "why, then, the thing is not quite so ridiculous, Lygon."

"But you are talking as if my wife could lend herself to such chambermaid's devices."

"She may have done so, and yet been irreproachable," replied Berry.

"Irreproachable!" repeated Arthur, scornfully.

"Yes, perfectly so. Such things may have been forced upon her by another, and she, placed in the position of having to choose between evils, may have chosen the lesser."

"The lesser being—what I will not describe—what is the greater?" replied Lygon, struggling with passion.

"Yes, tell me the lesser," returned Berry, fixing his eyes keenly on Lygon.

"What!" said Arthur, angrily. "Are you asking me to imagine a wife, who has an honourable man's love and trust, sending him away in the morning with an affectionate kiss and glance, bidding him return as early as he can, and calling the children to say good-bye; and then, as the door closes behind him, looking after him with a smile of the contempt a deceiver feels for the deceived, and turning complacently to her clandestine letters? Tell me your greater wrong, for *that* is beyond my imagination."

"It is you who are at the French picture now," said Berry, "and devilishly you have blackened it."

Mrs. Berry here felt it her duty to protest, by gesture, against her husband's adverb.

"Yes," said the old man, in a kinder tone than he had hitherto used, "you may be doing a cruel injustice. It may be that the very woman whom you accuse of smiling at her dupe, has at the mo-

ment you describe her eyes flooded with tears at the thought of her withheld confidence, that she would give the world not to have been induced to become a party to deceit, and that if she could but have placed those letters in her husband's hands, and leaned on his bosom as he read them, her heart, which may be as true as gold, would have been lightened of a bitter load. But you men of the world, as you call yourselves, have experiences which always help you to the worst construction of a woman's act."

Arthur Lygon laid a rather strong grasp on his friend's wrist.

"Mr. Berry," he said, in a suppressed voice, "you are doing one of two things. You are either talking vaguely, in the idea of getting through our interview without telling me what I seek to know, or you are preparing me for a revelation which, as your wife has said, is terrible indeed. I would not willingly insult you by believing that you are trying to waste time."

"That is well, at all events," said Mr. Berry, coldly. "You have given me your overdrawn and malicious view of what may be a perfectly innocent woman's course, and I will only ask you, for your future peace of mind, to remember that I have pointed out to you how such a course ought to be regarded by a man who truly loves."

"My wife has then conducted a secret correspondence," said Mr. Lygon, sternly. "Leave to me the question how her conduct shall be dealt with."

"I have not said that it is so, but that it may be so. Granting that it is ——"

And Mrs. Berry's eyes were fixed intently upon Arthur's, to watch how he would receive the rest.

"Granting that it is, can you, in the excess of the love you profess for Mrs. Lygon, imagine no state of things that could justify such a course on her part?"

"You know that I cannot wring the truth from you," said Lygon, bitterly, "and therefore you let it ooze out drop by drop. You have already told me that which I wish to God I had not heard, but will you give me at once what explanation there may be, or am I to turn to Mrs. Berry?"

"I have said that I am silent," said Mrs. Berry, "but had I been permitted to speak, I would have spared him this long suffering."

"I know your mercy," said her husband, meaningly. "He is better in my hands. Arthur, it is true that there is a secret in the family of Mr. Vernon. But to reveal it to the world would simply be the cruellest act of wickedness. What has been done was done long ago, and bitterly and fully repented of. Circumstances have entirely changed, and the matter should be consigned to utter oblivion. That secret, however, is known to certain persons, and two of them are Mrs. Urquhart and Mrs. Lygon."

"How long has Mrs. Lygon known it?"

"Always—that is to say, from the time when the circumstances arose."

"Which was before her marriage?"

"Long before. And without having any knowledge whatever that those ladies may have corresponded in connection with it, I do not consider such a thing improbable."

"And with this secret you couple my wife's disappearance?" asked Arthur, in agitation.

"I cannot say that I see any other solution of the mystery."

"And the secret," gasped Arthur, "and the secret——"

Berry stole a look at his wife's face. It was marble; but in the marble was the hungry, unpitying look, that told him there was no mercy there. One of them must assuredly speak, and therefore it had better be himself.

"The secret, Arthur," he said, "is that a woman was weak, and a man was a villain."

That was a strange effect which came over the face of Arthur Lygon at the words. The eyes lighted up with pleasure, a smile came to the lips, and a half sob proclaimed that a weight was suddenly lifted from his heart. The voice, though broken, was almost cheerful, as he replied—

"And Laura has kept the secret from me! Well, she knew all, and what there was to pity—and—she should have told me. I might have been trusted."

Watch, Marion Berry, Oh, watch, as the statue watches the place where the treasure is hidden.

"I need name no name," said Berry, hurriedly.

"No, no. I understand all that I need know.

This accounts for the residence in France?" said Arthur, in an undertone.

"Yes."

"And Laura has hurried off there."

"Why, is the mystery."

"Which shall soon be no mystery. I will follow by the next train. You will take care of my child."

"Stay," said Mr. Berry, "stay."

"When I have a clue to Laura!"

"Still, stay."

"Are you mad, Berry?" said Arthur, smiling. "I shall be with her at this hour to-morrow—sooner—sooner. Why, I am on the road, man; I think there is a mid-day boat."

"But consider one thing," said Mr. Berry.

"I can consider nothing, except the quickest way to *her*."

"Which may not be the blindly rushing after her," said Mr. Berry. "You do not seem to remember all that you told—that you showed me."

"Showed you?" said Arthur, bewildered, for the one idea had blotted out all the recollections.

"A note," said Mr. Berry, though with reluctance, for he had not wished his wife to hear of this.

"A note. True," said Arthur, hastily taking a paper from his pocket. "A foolish, mad note; but what does it matter now? Ah! Look at it, Berry, and tell me. Is it—is it her husband's writing?"

Mrs. Berry darted to *her* husband's side, and a glance at the writing was enough for her.

"I scarcely know his hand," said Berry.

"He calls her Vernon, her maiden name," said Lygon, eagerly. "He is Scotch, and they often do that——"

"It is not Mr. Urquhart's writing," said Mrs. Berry.

"You are certain?" asked Arthur.

"I am certain."

"That's strange. No, it might have been stranger if it had been," said Arthur. "But we will clear up all mysteries together. Dear, dear child, why was she so wild, so untrustful—I have not deserved it. I swear to you, Berry—but I can comprehend her heart—they had been so closely attached, in sorrow as well as in happiness. Silly child—she shall pay me for this—God bless her." And the strong man's eyes fairly ran over with tears.

Can you hear that prayer, Mrs. Berry, you who are in the habit of praying—and can you keep *your* eyes so steady and tearless?

"I must see about the trains," cried Arthur, hastily dashing his hand over his face—not that he was ashamed of his emotion, or at that moment had a thought for anything except the recovery of Laura. "Let us go in. I will give Clara a kiss, and be off at once on the chance of catching what conveyance I can."

And he hurried with a light step to the porch, leaving his host and hostess to themselves.

"You are happy, now, I trust, Marion," said Mr. Berry, reproachfully.

"This is not a world for happiness, Mr. Berry," was the icy reply. He thought it was but one of the pietist's ordinary formulas. But he should have looked at her eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE carriage in which Mrs. Lygon was conveyed from the boat was speedily out of Boulogne, and proceeded with unusual rapidity along the high road, whence it turned, after about two miles of progress, down a wide lane, at the end of which a second turning brought the vehicle before the door of a plain, almost mean-looking, two-storied, steep-roofed house, that looked like a third-rate English inn. There was no garden or lawn in front, the ground before the door was carelessly kept, and fowls were busy on various heaps of rubbish, chiefly of a vegetable character, that had been flung out at the door. The green outside blinds were all closed, with the exception of one that was falling from its place, and which it might have been dangerous to disturb on its single rusty hinge. The door had been white, but it was warped and split, and it looked unusually in want of priming and painting, and the stone before it was lamentably cracked. Yet, somehow, squalid as the house really was, it had a cheery, French look in the sunshine, and a pretty paysanne, with much colour in her dress and more in her cheeks, was an additional and improving feature, as she stood, leaning against the open door, and singing very loud to some

apples, as rosy as herself, which she was busily peeling.

At the sight of Adair the song ceased like the jet of a suddenly cut-off fountain, and the face of the girl assumed an almost sullen expression. To a few words, which he addressed to her in French, she made no reply, but obeyed them by entering the house and opening a door on the other side of the large room which served for hall and kitchen. The opening the further door showed a mass of green foliage beyond, shining in the bright sunlight.

Ernest Adair alighted, and opened the carriage-door.

"I need not recal the house to your recollection, Madame," he said. "It was much used, in other days, for pleasant little parties, at some of which you have assisted. The present proprietor has closed it against that class of visitors, but it is in charge of the respectable Madame Maletarde, whom you may remember as the cook, hostess, *femme-de-chambre*, and everything else, to the ladies who honoured the place. But, as I concluded that you would have no special anxiety to see that worthy person, or rather to be seen by her, upon this occasion, madame has somehow been called away to the town, and has left her niece in charge. Justine has never been in this part of the country before."

All this was said with the utmost deliberation before the speaker offered Mrs. Lygon his hand to

assist her from the carriage. Indeed, as he stood at the door, he presented an obstacle to her alighting.

"I observe," he went on, "that you look with very well-merited distaste at the house, and I am scandalised at asking you to enter so ill-repaired a place. It is but to enter, however, for if you will condescend to pass into the garden, we can there say, in perfect security from interruption, all that is necessary, and the carriage will await you where it stands. As regards refreshments——"

"I want nothing," was the reply.

"In that case, will you be pleased to follow me?"

They passed through the large room, over which Mrs. Lygon gave a woman's rapid glance, and was reminded of pleasant joyous days when a merry little company—including herself and her young husband—came forth in procession from the town, bearing with them materials for a little feast, and quartered themselves upon the delighted Madame Maletarde, whose garden they ransacked for additions to the banquet, and whose utmost culinary skill was gladly exerted to prepare it. There was but a moment for the recollection of the laughing, and the love-passages, and the rest of the happy meetings, a moment to hush down the swelling heart, and Mrs. Lygon stood in the well-remembered garden.

"We are out of ear-shot," said Adair, "though it is of little consequence, for Justine, though she loves the English, has no syllable of their language. I will fetch you a chair."

"I will stand."

"I accept the hint not to fatigue you by too long an oration. You will, I know, forgive my omission to express to you the thanks which fill my heart for your having obligingly consented to come here, and you will prefer that I should proceed with almost mercantile brevity to the business which has induced me to ask your presence. I have rightly interpreted your feelings, I trust."

She made no reply.

"Precisely. Another graceful protest against garrulity. That I may not offend again, will you kindly allow this letter to speak for me? It is not my own writing, but that of a person who is in every way more entitled to your attention."

He produced a pocket-book, from which he took a letter, opened it, and handed it respectfully to her.

Mrs. Lygon evinced no surprise at seeing the handwriting, but a flush of angry shame came over her beautiful face as she perused the lines. This evidence of feeling was noted by her companion, and a smile of satisfaction stole to his lips, to be instantly repressed.

The letter was to himself, and written by a sister of her who read it. It was this:

"Have you no pity, Ernest? Why are you driving me to ruin? Again and again, I assure you, on my knees, that it is impossible for me to meet your repeated demands, and I passed two days in an agony lest the means you forced me to adopt last week should have been discovered. I can give you

no more, at least now, and, for mercy's sake, leave me in peace for a short time. I send you a ring, which I suppose is valuable, and which will supply the immediate need you speak of; but do, Ernest, try to spare me. Remember, that if you force me into any act that may betray me, your own hopes from me must be at an end for ever. You press me so cruelly that I am at times on the point of confessing all, and if the opium which I take to escape from my dreadful thoughts should make me light-headed, I know not what I may say. Pray, Ernest, spare me for your own sake, if not for that of

"B. U."

Mrs. Lygon read the latter part of the note hastily, but not so hastily as to fail in comprehending its significance. She was about to return it to him, and then instinctively drew back her hand.

"Nay," he said, "I am not playing a mean and petty game. I have no wish to retain a document that might inculpate the writer. Pray retain and destroy it, if you please; or rather I would say retain it as your credentials for the negotiation which I trust to succeed in inducing you to undertake for me."

"For you."

The words were said in such a tone of contempt that a worm might have turned at them, though Adair did not.

"The expression has the misfortune to displease you. I repeat it, and apologise. Let me say, then,

the negotiation which I trust you will undertake for the sake of the writer of that interesting letter."

"Ernest Hardwick—" said Mrs. Lygon.

"Ah," he murmured, "the old name, and it is ever the sweetest."

Disregarding his insolence, she proceeded:

"You know for what reasons I have undertaken a certain task."

"The last word is harsh," he said, "but we will pass it by. I believe myself to be aware of those reasons."

"You hold this unfortunate creature in your power, and I know that it is idle to make any appeal to your heart."

"And idleness is a charge which no one could ever bring against Miss Laura Vernon or Mrs. Arthur Lygon," said he, in a passionless voice.

"You have had a great deal of money from her, and your demands for more are endangering her position as a wife."

"With what rapidity, in combination with what exactitude, does Mrs. Lygon master the contents of a letter!"

"And we must perfectly understand our position, if anything is to be done," said Laura, without deigning the slightest notice of his interruptions.

"Might I venture to suggest that one of us seems—or is it an unfortunate misconception on my part?—to be slightly in danger of forgetting that position."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Mrs. Lygon," he said, his tone changing, and his pale face becoming almost savage in expression, "I mean that though I may choose to forget certain things which it is not useful to me at the moment to remember, they need not be forgotten by other persons."

She turned well-nigh as pale as himself, but looked at him with firmness, and answered calmly,

"I repeat, that I do not understand you."

"So!" said, or rather cried, Adair, in a high voice, and with angry surprise. He glared at her for a few seconds; but, whatever she may have felt, she stood her ground bravely.

"So," he repeated. "*That* is the result of our deliberation. That is the decision of our council of war. We are to fight. Councils of war never vote for fighting, but pass for that. Defiance! Well, it is a bold game, but bold games seldom succeed when I am on the other side. However, it is not with Mrs. Lygon that I have now to do. Her turn may come."

"I am entirely at a loss to find meaning for your words," said Mrs. Lygon, "and, perhaps, you will listen to me. If I succeed in procuring more money for you from Mrs. Urquhart, what security have we that this will be your last demand?"

"None whatever."

"Will it be your last demand?"

"Most certainly not."

"Do you mean that you intend to persecute her throughout her whole life?"

"I would prefer to say that I hope to induce her to dedicate her life to making mine as happy as it can be when I am deprived of her."

"Have you ever seen her husband, Mr. Hardwick?"

"The Scottish Urquhart? I long since made it my business to see and to be able to recognise him. He is a fine animal, far too largely framed for elegance, and probably six feet three in height, and proportionately—I will do him that justice—proportionately broad and strong. Is your inquiry intended to direct the conversation towards the possibility of that person and myself ever coming into collision?"

"Do you know his character?"

"Mrs. Lygon's question scarcely reveals her usual perspicacity. Through my knowledge of Mr. Urquhart's character I have acted, with much success, upon the character of his wife. This large Scotchman, or Scottishman, as I believe he would prefer to be called, is understood to be of a stern and resolute nature. He is a railway contractor, and it is agreeably recorded of him that upon one occasion he found a crowd of Belgian workmen wasting his time in drinking, when they should have been at their duty. Our admirable friend remonstrated, but Scotch is not the language of persuasion, I suppose, for they would not go to work, and signified the same through a big brave Belgian, their foreman. On which the Scottish giant resorted to the extreme remedy of taking that

brave big Belgian into his Caledonian arms, and pitching him bodily off a viaduct to a road I do not know how many feet below, but quite enough to ensure the Belgian's never rising any more until the day when we shall all rise together. The men then went to their work. The anecdote charmed me very much—excuse my prolixity in retailing it."

"You have not, perhaps, considered what would be the consequence of Mr. Urquhart's becoming aware of the course you pursue towards his wife?"

"Do me more justice. I think that being a Scotchman, he would make all reasonable inquiry before acting, but I think that when his preliminary inquiry was complete, he would probably destroy your amiable sister."

"Yet you refuse," she said, "to name a sum, which, if paid, would free her from any further importunities on your part?"

"Please to inform me why I should."

"Because, if she thinks as I do," said Mrs. Lygon, "she will prefer an hour of sorrow to a life of torment, and unless you are to be bought off at once and for ever, she will throw herself upon the heart of the brave and good man who has married her, explain all, and be—perhaps divorced, perhaps forgiven—but, in either case, she will know the worst."

"And my neck will infallibly be broken by the giant, as a sort of peace-offering to the *manes* of departed domestic happiness—that is, of course, part of your delightful programme?"

"I think he would kill you! I hope he would kill you!" said Mrs. Lygon, with a simple frankness that belonged to her old days, and which, in spite of the vindictive character of the words, was by no means so utterly unfeminine as it may be feared that they seem.

Ernest Adair laughed outright.

"That came from the heart," he said, "and the estimable Goethe, whom I idolise, has told us that whatever comes from the heart is divine and to be honoured, in which he differs from certain other authorities. But, as I have said, I shall endeavour to protect myself against such a casualty; and I have the best means of knowing when anything likely to lead to it takes place in Mr. Urquhart's house."

"Spies, too, upon her."

"Well, it is not much in France. Here we are accustomed to surveillance, and a little of it more or less is not worth counting."

Mrs. Lygon could not reply.

"I am happy to see that I convince you. Well, you will go to Paris, and see your admirable sister, and between you, as in the old days, you will strike out some plan for preventing my having the humiliation of so frequently being compelled to remind her of my need."

"Where am I to send to you?"

"Fear no trouble on that account. A single word on a card, which you can entrust to Mrs. Urquhart's maid, Henderson, will bring me to any place you may indicate."

"In the power of the servant, too! I will go to Paris."

"There will be a train in an hour."

"I go alone."

"Assuredly. But shall I not attend you to the station?"

"I prefer to go alone."

"Money—if one might suggest—"

"I am provided."

"In that case, our interview is over. The carriage is at the door, where we left it."

"There is mischief in her head," said Adair, as Mrs. Lygon drove away.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SOME breakfast at your earliest convenience, Mrs. Hawkesley," said her husband, who, in an exceedingly comfortable easy chair, was making himself master of the forty-eight columns of close reading, acquaintance with which has become the rule of daily life for every man who supposes himself to be civilised, and fit for intercourse with the world. Who says that this is not a reading age? Somebody who utters his thoughts without due consideration. A gentleman who fairly reads his newspaper every day, gets through, almost as matter of amusement, more study of condensed matter in a week than any *helluo librorum*, whose omnivorous digestion of books continues on record in servile biographies, ever could have performed in ten times that period. Let us stand up for ourselves, and not be overriden by the fabulists.

"Well, what is your hurry?" said his smiling and still handsome wife, *née* Beatrice Vernon, who had just come down, looking exceedingly fresh and cheerful, as the British matron should look in the mornings. That simple, ample dress, plain in its neatness, was expressly invented to complete the idea of home. It *is* a dress, mind, and not a wrap, or anything that means slipping down to breakfast anyhow, and

attending to one's toilette afterwards, as the manner of some is.

"I'm never in a hurry, Betty, but look at the clock."

"The clock's wrong, and we were late last night, and we are half an hour earlier than yesterday, when you made no complaint, and I won't be called Betty," said Mrs. Hawkesley, pleading several matters, as the lawyers say, and giving her lord the tiniest blow on the ear as she passed him to her place at the table.

"Make the coffee good, and I will condone that assault," said Charles Hawkesley, "but not otherwise. There are some awful warnings to bad wives in to-day's accounts from the Divorce Court."

"There are no bad wives," replied Mrs. Hawkesley; "and if there are they are made so by their husbands. Is there anything interesting?"

"An earthquake in Java has destroyed several towns, and about ten thousand people."

"Nonsense about earthquakes—what do I care about earthquakes?"

"If some people continue to increase in size as they are doing," said Mr. Hawkesley, with an affectation of mumbling to himself, "the subject may not be so uninteresting to some other persons, one of these days."

"It's a great story, and don't you be impertinent, sir. Mrs. Orbit says I am a great deal slighter than I was six months ago. Will you have anything beside the eggs, dear?"

"Yes, a good many things; but I think I see

nearly all that I shall want. I have at last taught you how a breakfast-table ought to look."

"*You* taught me, indeed," said his wife, with a toss of her head in pretended scorn. "Much you knew of the comforts of a proper table when you were a bachelor in chambers."

"Bachelors in chambers are not exactly starved and miserable wretches," said Charles Hawkesley, knowingly.

"Then they ought to be, selfish creatures. Is your coffee sweet enough, dear?"

"I don't know, madam—ask at a proper time, and not when one is skinning a Negg."

Do you want any more of this, or is the above enough to show that Charles and Beatrice Hawkesley were a pleasant, affectionate couple, exceedingly fond of one another, and by no means displeased with a world that smiled on them both?

"There is nothing in the paper, I suppose," said Mrs. Hawkesley.

"Well—you scorn my humble earthquake—let's see. Would you like to hear what Lord Palmerston says about the state of the continent?"

"Does he say that you are to take me to Baden-Baden this year? If he does, read it out by all means, and write an article saying that he is the best man that ever lived."

"No, he does not say that, so far as I see. In fact his words seem to imply that you ought not to go, for he speaks of probable disturbances, and even revolutions."

"The very things I want to see. I should like to see a revolution of all things in the world, so you write about lodgings for us, do you hear, sir?"

"To hear is to obey," said Hawkesley; "that is to say, we'll take it *ad avisandum.*"

"We'll take it in July," said handsome Mrs. Hawkesley.

"Very smart, dear. You must have been surreptitiously looking into my new comedy, and caught a taste of repartee. No, there is not sugar enough."

"Yes, I have been looking at it, and I like it very much, and we will spend some of the money you are to get for it on the trip to Baden."

"And suppose it is dee, dash dee?"

"It will not be—it is capital, I tell you—and if it should be—it will show that you want change of air, to put more oxymel into your system."

"Oxymel," laughed the author. "I never heard that mentioned as good for comedies."

"Well, oxygen," said Mrs. Hawkesley. "It's all the same. When is the play to come out?"

"In a fortnight, or else it must stand over till next season, which I should prefer."

"But I should not. I hate keeping things back; and in your case I am sure that does not answer, for you think over them, and find fault, and fidget, and try to make them better, and who thanks you for your trouble."

"An admiring posterity, my dear, directed by the intelligent critics of the twentieth century, will thank

me. Think of that, and reverence the pale student wasting his health and the midnight oil."

"Pale student, indeed," said Beatrice, looking lovingly at her lord. "I should like to catch you looking pale, or wasting my oil either. You work a great deal too hard as it is."

"And so, round comes the argument to Baden-Baden again?" said Hawkesley.

"You know I don't mean that," said his wife hastily touching his hand affectionately.

"My dear love!"

They understood one another perfectly well.

"Graissessac and Beziers," read Hawkesley, recurring to his *Times;* "is not that one of Urquhart's lines?"

"Yes," said his wife, eagerly. "No accident, I hope."

"A fall of an embankment—no particular harm done—but the line is stopped until the engineer can set all right again."

"Then I suppose that Robert will have to be there."

"He is there by this time, depend upon it, and driving the clod-compellers before him like frightened sheep."

"But what a bore for Bertha, that he has to be always running away to attend to something of that kind. Why doesn't he build churches and theatres, or something that would keep him in Paris with her, poor thing?"

"One reason, my dear, which may be as good as

a dozen, is that he is a civil engineer and not an architect."

"I thought is was all the same," said Mrs. Hawkesley, who, be it at once stated, was a woman to be loved and honoured, for she never pretended to understand everything, and received every correction of her originally imperfect education with the frankest good-humour, and by virtue of that abstinence and that practice, became really far better informed than nineteen out of twenty of the regularly educated women of her acquaintance.

"But," said Hawkesley, "it occurs to me that you are compassionating Bertha upon a subject on which she may not particularly want your sympathies. One does not care to talk much on such matters; but I have told you that I think she manages to endure Robert's absences exceedingly well, and like a strong-minded woman, and not as a weak creature like yourself would bear mine, if I were called away to get up plays in Belgium or the South of France."

"Indeed, yes," said Beatrice. "I frankly tell you that I could not endure it. I want you to be with me, and hear all I have to say, and—well, after all, one's husband *is* meant to be one's companion, isn't he?"

"I believe there may have been some such intention, when the marriage relations were devised," said Charles Hawkesley, demurely, "but we have improved all that."

"I should like to catch you improving it," said

Beatrice, pouring her husband his second cup of coffee, which by the way was as hot and as strong as the first. "But what you say about Bertha is quite true, though I do not like to admit it even to myself. Charles, it is a dreadful thing to say of one's own sister—"

"Don't say it, dear. I will say it for you. Bertha does not care for Robert Urquhart any more than I care for—for that girl who just brought the plate."

"Do not go so far as that, dear. Honour, and respect, and regard him she must—how can she help it? But as for loving him, Charles, I don't believe that she does."

"I do not think that she has—shall I say sense enough, to know how worthy he is of her honour and regard."

"Charles, you never understood Bertha. She is a very clever girl—much cleverer than I am, for instance."

"My dear child," he replied warmly, "if you will raise a comparison, you force me to say what it seems absurd in a middle-aged husband to be saying to his wife at her breakfast-table, namely, that she is not worthy to hold your shawl. But leaving you out of the question, I do not believe in her cleverness, and I utterly disbelieve in her heart."

"You have said that before, Charles, and I have always assured you that you do not understand her. Perhaps it is because you over-refine, and get too subtle about her character, and perhaps you have

heard so much about her from me, and have got prejudiced. You would judge her more fairly if she were more a stranger."

"We do not see a great deal of her."

"No, but I have told you so much, such heaps of little things, and you have put them together in your own way, and made up a person out of them, just as baby sticks the puzzle together after his own fashion, and calls it 'all wite.'"

"Well, if I am no nearer all right than baby, so much the better for Bertha and Robert," said Hawkesley; "but I am not shaken in my conviction at present. But we agree upon the most important point."

"I am sorry to say that we do, Charles."

"I think he loves her."

"As intensely as ever, Charles; that I am certain of. He is one of those men whose feelings are not easily detected, but I have no more doubt of that proud, cold, stern man's loving Bertha than I have of—"

"Of this proud, cold, stern man's loving Beatrice."

"No," said Mrs. Hawkesley, earnestly, and with something of a tear rising to her eyes, "I won't say that, Charles, because that is like taking an oath. That you love me I *know*, and if I were made to walk through fire, nothing could burn out that belief —that is part of *me*. But as far as I can be certain of anything else, I am certain of his affection for my sister."

"And where, dearest, is the intellect you speak

of, when the woman is not proud of having inspired affection in such a man as Robert Urquhart?"

"Well, I think she is, at times," returned his wife, slowly.

"I don't think much of temporary sanity."

"And then he is not the man to invite a woman's affection."

"I thought that a sort of general invitation was included in a certain Service which you know of. But, to speak gravely, ought she not, as I say, to be so proud of such a husband, that if there be a certain crust or armour that seems to come between her and his heart, she should devote her whole life and love to the breaking through it, and becoming the wife of his trust as well as of his admiration and love?"

"We were brought up very carelessly, dear Charles, and perhaps we derived some odd notions from the books we read, and the people we were obliged to know."

"I forbid you to place yourself with Bertha, even when you are using a sister's best efforts to excuse her."

"Well, I do not, dear Charles; it would be affectation if I did. I have had a great advantage in having married—not very unhappily," she said, turning an arch and loving look towards him, "and when a woman has learned the lesson of real happiness, she can easily learn any other lesson of good. But Bertha's marriage, though, as you say, it is a grand one, cannot be called happy. It is of no use

—at least, it is of no use for you and me to try and deceive ourselves about it."

"It ought to be happy, with such a man, so truly devoted to her, and every comfort of life about her."

"In saying that, dear, you talk like a man, and you think as men insist upon thinking about us, measuring us out our privileges by line and rule—"

"And giving capital measure. Come?"

"Capital. But we are not to be measured and fitted, poor creatures, in that way; and you must not insist on our opening debtor and creditor accounts with you, and being good because we ought to be good. You will often find the books very badly kept; not that we mean to cheat you; on the contrary, we delight to throw everything we have in the world into your hands, in exchange for a kind look, but we cannot be made to pay love merely because we owe it."

"A most singular and objectionable way of conducting one's affairs, Beatrice, dear. I could put it a little more severely—"

"But you shall not. You know what I mean. And perhaps it is that very feeling on Bertha's part that all the world is looking at her, and expecting her to be a model wife in return for the great things that have been done for her, that checks her from being as good as she might be."

"And you consider it an excuse for not doing one's duty, that one is expected to do it?"

"Women don't like to be expected to do anything. But do not suppose—of course you will

not—that I am making the least excuse for Bertha. That is only my nonsense, or at least something that may go a little way to explain things, not to apologise for them. I only mean, dear, that if it had been Bertha's good fortune to have a husband of a gentler nature—"

"If I, for instance, had not previously been made prize of?"

"No—you would have had no patience with her caprices. How dare you smile like that? I have none, sir. No, but I think that a husband like Arthur would have made her a better wife."

"Arthur has chosen much better."

"Yes, I know you think Laura perfection. What a pity it was that she was too young for you."

"She was not. But do you think it a pity?"

"You know what I think. And I love you better for loving her, for she is a darling in word and in deed."

"What on earth does that mean?" said Charles Hawkesley, laughing. "I never heard such an unearthly arrangement of ideas. A darling in word and in deed."

"Be quiet," said Beatrice, smiling. "It is one of my pet phrases, and I won't have it found fault with. I know when you did not find fault with it."

"What—was I ever one?"

"No. But somebody was foolish enough to tell you so. And it is like your ingratitude to have forgotten it."

"I never forget anything. And I agree with you,

that though it would have been rather throwing away Arthur Lygon to hand him over to a girl who wanted so much done to her head and her heart, he would perhaps have been more successful than Urquhart. But possibly, Bettina, we may be begging the question after all, and in secret Robert Urquhart and his wife may be devoted lovers, preserving their appearance of distance when before the world."

"There, now, that is another of your book-writing notions—don't be angry, darling, you write beautiful books, and you don't want me at this time of day to tell you I think so—but people do not do those things. I defy a couple of people to love one another, and not let the world see it. Why one look, or one tone, when they are off their guard, tells the whole story. I only wish I could recall to my memory any single thing of that kind in the house at Versailles."

"You easily might, for *we* were there for a fortnight."

"Don't be a goose."

"Very well. By the way, are Arthur and his wife coming here on Saturday?"

"Why should they come to an empty house?"

"Do you call that any kind of answer which a decent man is bound to take at his own table? What do you mean, woman?"

"I mean Burnham Beeches."

"Eh? O!"

"Now, you mean Burnham Beeches."

"No, I do not. I mean to ask you whether you seriously purpose to take advantage of a promise wrung from a man who was hungering and thirsting for a cigar, and whose case, as it is generally believed, you had hidden away in order to extort an excursion?"

"Of course I do. We will go on Saturday, and we will stay on Sunday at Mr. Skindell's, go to church, dine quietly, and in the evening go on the water. And come—I will make the affair perfect for you—I will go round presently and see whether Laura will come with us and bring Arthur."

"And bring Arthur! And we spent twenty millions in liberating the blacks. However, let us rattle our chains—do as you like."

"I knew Laura's name would be a charm."

"So it is, and—well remembered—here is another charm, which I will bestow upon you."

Beatrice joined her hands, and caught the trinket.

"How very pretty! An hour-glass, with a pair of wings. Oh, thanks. Did you buy it for me?"

"Of course not. I found it between the leaves of a book at the British Museum."

"Story. It's quite new. I thought perhaps that one of your actresses might have given it to you, in gratitude for writing her a good part."

"You retain very vague notions about the manners and customs of those artists. However, it was not given me by one of my actresses,—I found it in Cockspur Street."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, indeed, and in company with a quantity of lovely coral, and behind a thick sheet of plate glass."

"It is very pretty; but you need not buy any more ornaments for me. I have got quite enough. A winged hour-glass! What does it mean?"

"It means," said the author rising, and getting to the door, "that the Hawkesleys, of Maida Hill, ought to have finished breakfast before eleven o'clock."

And he darted out of the room, followed by a merry threat and laugh.

CHAPTER XV.

In company with Arthur Lygon, we will shortly leave Lipthwaite for a time. Brief as his sojourn there had been, it seemed to him that an age had elapsed since he left Gurdon Terrace, and hurried indeed were his preparations for departure, now that he had obtained, as he believed, a clue to his wife's hiding-place. The only process which he permitted to delay him was the taking leave of Clara, who looked very disconsolate at the idea of being left in the charge of Mrs. Berry, and who had, perhaps, apprehensions that the venomous old Aunt Empson might make her re-appearance when there was no papa present to protect his child. However, Mr. Lygon gave her the most consolatory promises of his speedy return for her, and of the gift of a certain vast and splendidly-furnished doll's house, once seen in a beatific vision in the Lowther Arcade, and up to that time a thing to be whispered about, not dreamed of as a possession. And, finally, the assurance that her mother would be greatly pleased by Clara's showing that she could conduct herself like a lady in the absence of her parents, completed the moral strengthening, and Miss Lygon, wiping her eyes, declared herself equal to the endurance proposed to her.

"I need hardly ask," said Arthur Lygon to Mr. and Mrs. Berry, "that not a word on the subject of Mrs. Lygon may be said to Clara until I return."

"Not a syllable," said Mr. Berry.

"Or until you write and desire that any such communication may be made," said Mrs. Berry.

"That is not probable, my dear Mrs. Berry," said Lygon.

"I am a slave to my promises," replied Mrs. Berry, "and therefore I prefer to have them properly guarded and fenced before I enter into them."

"Quite right," said Arthur, in no mood to discuss anything just then.

"I will drive you over to the station," said Mr. Berry. "The next train will be there in an hour and a half from this moment."

"I thought I saw that a train arrived in half an hour."

"It does not stop here."

"But it stops at Hareton, and I could get over there in the time."

"Impossible."

"That is an answer, from *you*," said Lygon, "but it is vexatious to have to throw away an hour when it may be so valuable at the other end of the journey."

"That thought should remind you of a more solemn one, Arthur," said Mrs. Berry, "and lead you to recollect the folly of throwing away one hour, when we are in health and strength, and having to

look back upon such waste when we are on our dying beds."

The remark was unexceptionable, if not cheerful, and Mr. Lygon did not care to oppose it. Mr. Berry, however, made more allowance for his friend's feelings than his wife's, and observed, with some asperity:

"Oh, bother."

"Nay," said Arthur, "Mrs. Berry is perfectly right, and we do not always think of these things."

For he was so thankful for the revelation that had taken place, and for the removal of so much weight from his mind, that he could not speak with unkindness even towards a person whom he had hated, and to whom a sort of false reconciliation had not made him draw with any closeness of regard.

"Do not think of speaking in my behalf, Mr. Lygon," she said, with the wronged woman's look this time very strong upon her. "It is our duty to submit to insult. I might almost say that it is our privilege."

"Nobody thinks of insulting you, Marion," said Mr. Berry; "but you must own that when a man's mind is intensely set upon an object dear to his heart, that's a bad minute to select for preaching him a sermon on dying beds."

"When I become aware," said Mrs. Berry, mournfully, "that we are enjoined to watch until it shall be pleasant to our fellow-creatures to hear what we are commanded to tell them, I shall, I trust, obey the injunction. Meantime, I cannot but remember

that we are to be instant in season and out of season."

"Yes, but you are always out of season," said her husband, irreverently, and in some irritation walking away from the breakfast-room, muttering something about ordering the chaise.

"Clara has promised to be an excessively good girl while I am away, Mrs. Berry," said Arthur, taking the child's hand; and she, like yourself, always keeps her promises."

"We will endeavour to aid her in fulfilling it, at all events," said Mrs. Berry, almost kindly. "We will not talk about being excessively good, because that would be a presumptuous expression; but we will endeavour to avoid such faults as guardianship and advice can save us from."

"It will not be for long, my pet," thought Arthur, after the excellent lady had paraded her dictionary words.

"And as for lessons," continued Mrs. Berry, "I dare say that we can contrive not to be retrograde."

"O, suppose we give her a holiday, Mrs. Berry; she will be less trouble to you, and I dare say that she will have no objection."

"I dare say not," said Mrs. Berry; "we are all unfortunately prone to prefer our pleasures to our duties. But the beautiful little hymn says:

> That I may give for *every* day
> Some good account at last.

Those are the words, Mr. Lygon. Every day. Not

every day except the day when I happened to be in the country, and thought I should like to play about the garden."

"It says healthful play," said Clara colouring. "Books, or work, or healthful play."

"So it does, little lady," said her papa, smiling. "You see that we have taught her something, Mrs. Berry."

"I fear that it is better not to know, than to use our knowledge wrongly," said the lady, who had for once been tripped up by the memory of the child, but who was satisfied with the mildest form of defence. But for something that was in Mrs. Berry's head just then, Clara might not have been the gainer in comfort by this little victory. Mrs. Berry, however, looked at her quite gently for Mrs. Berry, and continued, "Healthful play, my dear, means play at such hours as those who have the care of your health prescribe for your relaxation. We will not forget the play, but papa will also allow us to remember the work."

"Clara will do as she is bid," said Mr. Lygon, though not much pleased.

The hour passed, and Mr. Berry, who had kept himself out of the way, came in to say that the chaise would be at the gate in five minutes.

"Why not at the porch?" said Mrs. Berry.

"Because it will be at the gate," said her husband, doggedly. He was in anything but an amiable temper, and snapped this reply in a way quite unusual with the good-natured old gentleman.

"I regret that in Clara's presence such an example of politeness should be afforded," said Mrs. Berry to Lygon; "but she should know that big folks often do and say things which little folks must not imitate."

Her husband's glance at her was a downright savage one, almost evil.

"If Clara learns nothing worse in this house but what she will learn from me, she will not come to much harm. I can't say as much for everybody."

Mrs. Berry perfectly comprehended the meaning, that did not lie on the surface, but smiled and said:

"Mr. Berry is very properly thinking of the servants, with whom it is objectionable that a very young person should hold much intercourse. But we will take care upon that point."

"Now, Lygon, if you are ready," said Mr. Berry, turning from the window.

"If I am ready! Adieu, my darling," and he pressed Clara to his heart and kissed her affectionately. "Farewell, Mrs. Berry; I will thank you for all your kindness when I return."

"That will be quite time enough," said Mrs. Berry, very graciously; "I would charge you with messages, but you will have enough to think about. Let us hear of you, and farewell!"

He went out, and Clara was following to have a last kiss, when Mrs. Berry called her back.

"Your papa has said good-bye to you, Clara."

The child stood still at command, but her little

heart was overflowing, and she gazed very wistfully down towards the gate.

"Would you like to say one more good-bye?" said Mrs. Berry, quickly.

There was a "yes" in the swimming eyes suddenly turned upon the monitrix.

"Then, here," she said, taking a little Testament from the table, "run and give papa this, and tell him he is to read it on his way."

Clara fled away like a bird.

Berry was in the chaise, and Lygon's foot was upon the step, when the child, with her hair streaming in the wind, rushed up to her father's side, and delivered the volume and the message. Lygon smiled, but could not be displeased with what once more brought his lips to his child's forehead, and in another minute the friends departed.

"What was the book?" said Mr. Berry, gruffly.

"The good one," replied Lygon.

Evidently the old gentleman had resolved to be displeased with everything in the world.

"I don't mean that she is worse than anybody else in the same line," said he, "but it is gross impertinence, in my opinion, to treat other people as if they were heathens. What right had my wife to assume that you had not got the book in your travelling bag?"

"Ah, well," said Arthur, deprecatingly, "all people have their own ways and usages, and no very great wrong is intended."

"That's not the question," said Mr. Berry.

They drove on in silence for a few minutes, and Berry then said,

"There."

Without another word he put an envelope into Arthur's hand. Lygon looked at him inquiringly.

"Why, of course," said Berry, pettishly, "there's eighty pounds, in five-pound-notes. You need not count 'em, they are all right, you may take my word for it."

"I was not going to count them."

"Then you ought to have been. A man is a fool who takes money without counting it. Put 'em up, can't you. I would have given you gold, but I had only twenty sovereigns in the house. There they are in this bag. Take them, and don't lose the bag, if you can think of it. Get on, horse, will you."

And though the appeal to the animal's volition was gentle enough, the cut that immediately followed it was inconsistent as well as severe.

"Ah," said Arthur, "you think I might—"

"I don't think anything, but a man can do several things with an odd hundred pounds in his pocket, which he can't do without it. I say, did Mrs. Berry have any more talk with you after breakfast?"

"Only about Clara."

"Nothing else. Not a word about your present business?"

"Not a syllable. Why, did not Mrs. Berry promise that upon that subject she would not open her lips?"

"Lips. I hate the word 'lips.' It puts me in a rage."

Arthur looked at his companion in some astonishment.

"Yes; Mrs. Berry has been good enough to find time to justify the statement which, to my utter astounding, she made this morning. She told you that she had heard of your sorrow from my lips."

"Which was, I know, an untruth."

"It was nothing of the kind."

"What, you did tell her, then?"

"No."

"I don't, of course, understand."

"I should think not, and I should like to know who ever did understand a woman, especially when she grafts upon duplicity, which is natural to her, religion, which is not. Nice crabs come of that grafting, and this is one of them. She heard of the sorrow from my lips. It seems that when I woke in the morning—not that I had much sleep thinking of your affairs—I said to myself, 'Poor Arthur.' She never spoke. I thought she was asleep. But there it was from my lips, and she has been asking me what I thought of a husband who dared, in the presence of a third party, to accuse his wife, unjustly, of a falsehood."

"Those two words were all that passed before my meeting Mrs. Berry?"

"All. And on those two words hangs her entire justification of what she said to you. These are the notions of people who give away Testaments. Never mind. There's the station, and, by Jove! yonder comes the train. Look alive, you've just time. All

right! God bless you!—and Arthur, a word, if the train were upon us. Do nothing rashly. In, in, and get your ticket!"

Lygon saved the train, and was fortunate enough to catch the next for Folkestone.

It was not until he had been travelling for some time in this latter that he had completed his meditations on all that he had heard that crowded morning.

Later, and when on board the French boat, he put his hand into the pocket where lay the Testament he had received from the hand of his child. Opening the volume, though in anything but a spirit of gratitude to the donor, he perceived a note addressed to himself, and found that it had been slightly gummed between two pages to prevent its being lost.

Tearing it out and open, he read:—

"I was forbidden to speak, but not to write. You have heard but half the truth. What most concerned yourself has been withheld."

This, in the book of comfort, given by the hand of his darling, was Mrs. Berry's parting blow.

CHAPTER XVI.

"MISS HENDERSON," said Ernest Adair, as Mrs. Urquhart's servant entered a little room on the ground-floor of one of the little inns at Versailles, "you are punctual, but you don't look pleased."

"I shouldn't say I was," replied the domestic.

She was rather a pretty girl, in spite of a flattish face, a large mouth, with plenty of white strong teeth in it, a couple of hard black eyes, and a habit of erecting her head in a slanting and defiant manner.

"I am so sorry," said Ernest Adair, whose regret was certainly not expressed in the tone in which the careless words were said, nor was it more palpably demonstrated by the way in which he threw himself upon a straw-bottomed chair, placed his feet upon the other, and proceeded to kindle the eternal cigarette.

"Now, don't make me smell of smoke, Mr. Adair, but say what you want to say, and let me go, as we have got some people, and I shall be missed."

"You have got some people? Name the people."

"Nobody you know."

"That, my dear, is an assumption on a subject of which you know nothing. I know everybody,

and whether I do or not, be good enough to do as I ask you."

"Well, I don't know the names."

"That is an untruth."

"I declare I don't. Madame called one of the ladies her dear Louise."

"How long have they been there?"

"Only half an hour."

"English or French?"

"There is a gentleman and two ladies. He is French, and one of the ladies is English."

"Is that my dear Louise?"

"No, the other."

"You are short in your replies to-day, Miss Henderson, or shall I say Matilda—not that I believe that to be your name. I should have thought that your experience had told you that short answers do not suit me."

"I have told you all I know, and how can I tell you more?"

"You can tell me a great deal more, and will have the goodness to do so."

"I say then that I know nothing of them, except that they came in a carriage."

"How many horses, and their colour?"

"Two horses,—brown ones."

"Colour of carriage?"

"Dark green."

"There, you see, valuable information at once, which shows that you do not do yourself justice. They sent in their cards, I suppose?"

"Angelique took them in."

"You will be kind enough to copy them for me, and enclose the copy in one of those blue envelopes I gave you. Post it this evening."

"Very well. Is that all? I shall be sure to smell of smoke," said Matilda, "and Madame does hate it so."

"Naturally. It reminds her of her husband, who is never without a cigar, I think."

"I wish you were half as good a man as Mr. Urquhart."

"Never wish impossibilities, my dear. I have no ambition to attain such a sublime of virtue as can impress even Miss Matilda Henderson with admiration."

"Can I go?"

"Certainly not. What I have told you is the smallest part of our business. Your look of impatience is not lost upon me, and I answer it by saying that if you had chosen to tell me all that you have told me without giving me the trouble of questioning, we should have saved much time. So, if Madame boxes your ears it will be your own fault."

"Madame box my ears, indeed!"

"It might be for your good, occasionally," said Ernest. "I have felt that so strongly, that I have at times been inclined to do it myself, and I don't know that I may not yet make that effort for your improvement. In the meantime, I have something else to tell you."

"Do make haste," said the girl.

"You are going to have another visitor."

"Yes, I expected that."

"And why did you not mention your expectations to me?"

"Why, what time have I had? The note came only an hour ago."

"A lady's note, English hand, the letter L on the seal?"

"No, there was no seal."

"Careless in the writer, knowing the house she was writing to."

"It is like you, to drive a girl to spying and meanness, and then throw it in her teeth," said Matilda.

"Is it? I pique myself on my consistency, do you know?" returned Adair, smiling. "How did you manage to read the note?"

"I have not read it. Madame tore it open eagerly, and hurried through it, and seemed very much pleased. Then she went into the little spare bedroom, and looked about it, as if she wanted it to be ready for somebody."

"But gave no orders?"

"No. Don't I tell you that these other people came?"

"Very well; don't be angry. You have no idea who this new visitor is?"

"Not I. I shall know when she comes, I suppose, and that will be time enough for me."

"It will not. There are reasons why you should

know beforehand, and that is why I have asked your presence here, Miss Henderson."

"Well, who is it?"

"Your mistress's sister. What a tell-tale face you have! You look as pleased as if it were your own sister coming. Perhaps more so?"

"You have no call to talk about my sister, or anybody else belonging to me, Mr. Adair," returned the girl flushing up. "I shall be very glad if Mrs. Hawkesley is coming, because she is a kind creature."

"Visions of five-franc pieces spare my aching sight! ye unworn dresses crowd not on my soul!" said Adair, rather to himself than the girl.

"It has nothing to do with her presents," retorted Matilda, catching at the meaning of the parody; "but because she is truly kind and considerate, and thinks of a servant as if she were flesh and blood."

"Is that a reproach to me, for having failed to render due homage to your attractions?"

"Have you anything more to say to me, Mr. Adair?" said the girl, not vouchsafing to notice the speech.

"Yes. First, it is not Mrs. Hawkesley who is coming. Don't look vexed, Mrs. Urquhart's other sister is quite as well off as Mrs. Hawkesley, and there are several reasons why the visit may be a much better thing for you than if it were from that good-natured lady who kept you up so late from her love of going to the theatres."

"Is it Mrs. Lygon?"

"Certainly. Has your mistress a third sister?"

"Well, Mrs. Lygon is a very sweet lady, too; though she is prouder than Mrs. Hawkesley."

"What the deuce do you know about pride?" answered Adair, with an expression of bitter contempt, which stung the girl into sudden anger.

"As much as a gentleman," she replied hastily, "who sets servants to spy upon their mistresses, gets copies of letters and cards, and does all sorts of mean tricks."

"I like that honest outbreak," said Adair, not in the least discomposed. "I like earnestness, and never quarrel with the way in which it shows itself. But if I do some little things which offend the delicate feelings of a lady's-maid, I do some generous things to make up for them. I think that your handsome admirer, Monsieur Silvain, would not have got quite so well out of that little affair about Madame's wine and some other trifles, if I had not befriended him with the police."

"Poor Silvain would have been a better man, if —if you had not made his acquaintance," said Matilda, with tears rising to her eyes, "and why you should demean yourself to make friends with a perfumer I don't know, but I am sure for no good."

"I am sorry to hear such aristocratic sentiments from a daughter of the people," said Ernest Adair, gravely. "Don't you know that we are all equal, and though you think I ought to despise poor little Silvain—"

"Despise him, indeed!" cried she, in another

rage. "You have much more right to be despised by him, I can tell you that."

"Quite right, my dear. I have no settled residence and position in the world, whereas he has a charming little shop in which he sells the very worst perfumery in the whole world, at prices that will soon enable him to claim Mademoiselle Henderson's fair hand. But as she will not be able to give it without my approbation, she should not try to make me an enemy of the lover of her heart."

"I must go," said the girl. "What will Madame say?"

"I will secure you from Madame's anger. There. When I say a thing of that kind I mean it. Now, attend to me, and forget Monsieur Silvain for a moment. Mrs. Lygon is coming to visit your mistress, and as I want to arouse all your instincts as a lady's-maid, let me tell you that the visit is a secret one, and made without the knowledge of either of the ladies' husbands. Now, if Madame shows such want of confidence in you as to try to keep that from you, I suppose that you know what is due to yourself."

"What do I want to know about her secrets? If it was not for you I would never have touched one of her letters in my life."

"Thank me for having educated you into intelligence, then. And whether you care about her secrets or not, I care a good deal about them, and therefore I shall require you to be particularly on the alert until I tell you to relax your vigilance."

"You make me do what you like, but I hate myself, and—"

"And me. We all hate people who compel us to do sensible things, and I don't expect you to be wiser than the rest of the world. But I promise you that whatever you do, under my directions, shall be to your advantage; and it is exceedingly agreeable, my dear Mademoiselle Henderson, to put it in that way, instead of hinting at any little unpleasantness that might arise — let us say to Monsieur the perfumer, if he dropped out of my good graces through any indiscretion of yours. You understand?"

"Tell me what to do," said Matilda, doggedly.

"In the first place, Mrs. Lygon will not come direct to your house. She desires, as I say, to avoid meeting your large master."

"She can't meet him, for there has been some railway accident, and he is gone to set it right."

"Ah! That is news to me," said Adair, turning to her with more interest. "When did he go?"

"This morning."

"The brave man! The good man!"

"Yes, he is that," said Matilda, "though you do not mean it when you say it."

"But I do. He delights me much. I am pleased with the large Scotchman. Excellent Robert! Worthy Urquhart!"

He was occupied in new and sudden thought, and the mocking words dropped from his lips unmeaningly.

"That is well," he said, after a pause. "It would

be better if the other were not on his way; but Providence seldom sends us everything that we desire, and perhaps it would not be good for us, my dear, if it did. Not in Versailles—excellent! Then listen again, intending bride of Monsieur Silvain. Mrs. Lygon will be at your house sooner than expected. That is to say, she will meet her sister, to whom she has of course written, making an appointment, and Mrs. Urquhart will state to her that the Caledonian giant being away, his castle may be approached without fear. Now, I must know where the ladies meet; and that you must instantly find out for me. After they have come home, the business must be in your hands. So, off instantly with you, and manage to find the note which Mrs. Urquhart has received. If you can get it, do; but at all events learn the place of meeting, and bring the news to me."

"I think she put the note in her pocket. How am I to get at it?"

"Matilda, you make me blush for your incapacity. Am I to tell a lady's-maid what pretence to invent in order to get a dress into her hands—can I imagine that it is torn, or is not fit to go out in, or is wanted for a pattern, or any of the thousand-and-one lies that are already in your mind, and any one of which will do for an excuse to put your hand upon the letter? Do I not know the adroitness of your kind? Away, I tell you, and remember that I am waiting for you here, and shall count the minutes—"

"If I cannot get it."

"Then I shall not reproach you, my dear, but I think that the worthy Monsieur Silvain may be less forbearing, after the domiciliary visit with which the police may favour him, at an early date."

"I think you are a fiend," said Henderson, leaving the room.

"I don't think I am," said Ernest Adair, aloud, to himself, after her departure. "Indeed, I may say that I am sure I cannot be a fiend, because there are such manifest interpositions of Providence in my favour. What a very remarkable piece of good fortune it was that, instead of following Mrs. Lygon to the station, I resolved to remain in Boulogne, and see Jules Dufour about that other matter. And again, how fortunate that the said Jules had not recovered his night of gambling and drinking, and thereupon could not appear until the afternoon. Then, what an extraordinary good thing it was that I happened to think of watching the arrivals from England, and that I should hear Mr. Arthur Lygon announce his advent on the soil of France. Again it was a thing which really shows how I am favoured of fate, that he should believe that extremely respectable official whom I sent to throw himself in his way, and give him the exact time for the departure of the Paris train, which train my friend Mr. Lygon thereby missed. Well, in all these successes, I had some share; and I will not affect to be over-grateful to fortune, but in this last matter I claim no credit at all. Could I dream that

a railway accident would occur for the express purpose of sending out of Versailles that gentleman whose presence there was so peculiarly objectionable to me at the moment? No, I must distinctly dispute my friend Matilda's proposition, and assert, on the contrary, that I am not a fiend."

Ernest Adair either found pleasure in this kind of mocking self-communing with himself, or it had become a habit which he could not shake off. But, to do him justice, he never indulged in it at a time when it might have been dangerous, and it was a favourite phrase with him that the melodramatic expedient of an overheard soliloquy could not be fairly introduced in the drama of his life. But to talk to himself was Adair's custom, as it is with many men, who will avow that they never seem thoroughly masters of a plan, or thoroughly prepared for an interview, until they have held actual discourse with themselves upon it, and have had a sort of private rehearsal of what is to come. It has been held that talking to oneself is a sign of weakness, although the wittiest men have defended the practice by the wittiest suggestions; but there is perhaps a greater weakness, and that is the attempt to base a general psychological rule upon an accidental habit.

Adair had to wait longer than pleased him in the little room at the inn, nor did the questionable absinthe which he obtained there tend to make his hour pass the more agreeably.

But at length his spy returned, hurriedly, from

the house, which stood but a few hundred yards from the Place d'Armes.

"Victory, eh?" he said.

"Madame is actually out, and on her way to meet—"

"To meet where—where?"

"Near the Fountain of Neptune."

"What, in the gardens here?"

"Yes."

"Good child—excellent Matilda—embrace Monsieur Silvain on my behalf at the first opportunity," said Adair, hastily gathering up his cap and gloves.

"You will meet her, or she will see you. I could scarcely get away in time to run round."

"My dear Matilda," said Ernest Adair, "is there anything disreputable about me, which should make me avoid the eyes of your mistress?"

"Oh, I cannot understand you," said the girl.

"Probably not," he replied. "All in good time. Nay, you are a meritorious agent, and deserve the confidence of your principal. I will behave better to you than Mrs. Urquhart does, in that respect. I have no desire that the two ladies should have much opportunity of talking confidentially in the gardens, because I very much want to know what they say, and listening in the open air is not a very easy thing. Therefore, my dear Matilda, Madame Silvain that is to be, I shall endeavour to drive the ladybirds home, and therefore, at the right moment, I shall permit Mrs. Urquhart to see that I am in the neighbourhood."

"I can see her coming," said the girl, looking out of a side window.

"Very elegantly dressed, and in a way that does her maid the highest honour," said Adair. "That fair complexion of hers reminds me of my own beloved land—and now I think is just the time to go out. Remember, Madame Silvain, from the moment they return, you are to be all ear, except that you are to be also all eye, as I shall be particularly curious about any letters that may arrive during Mrs. Lygon's visit. And find out whether the Scotch giant sends any word of his intention to come home. Good child!"

He touched her black hair with his neatly gloved hand, and went out. The girl dashed her hand impatiently over the place he had touched, as if to blot out the impression of his having done so, and then looked to see the meeting between him and her mistress. But though from the door of the inn she could see Mrs. Urquhart entering the gates of the palace, Mr. Adair did not join her, nor could the girl catch any glance of him on her way home.

The fact simply was that Ernest Adair had gone in another direction, and long before Mrs. Urquhart had passed through the court-yard, he was in the gardens. How he managed this is not of much consequence; persons with Ernest Adair's private advantages over their fellows have frequently means of obtaining singularly irregular admission to all sorts of places, especially in France.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. URQUHART went on her way as rapidly as is consistent with the walk and bearing of an elegantly dressed woman in France, (one has seen an Englishwoman in England sufficiently oblivious of the grand duty of life as to be in an ungraceful hurry when on the way to an important interview, nay, even when she had only a kindness to do), and was soon within sight of the Fountain of Neptune. But she had another and an unwelcome sight to encounter before she could reach the basin in which stood and stands the sea-compelling Poseidon.

It was, however, no more repulsive an object than the well-dressed and striking-looking man who had been interesting himself so deeply in her movements, and he approached her with a newspaper in his hand, and apparently without seeing her.

Yet he might well have been excused for lowering his "Galignani," and noticing the beautiful woman who advanced.

Exquisitely fair, and with features of singular regularity, Mrs. Urquhart was permitted, even in Paris, to pass for a beauty. Her walking costume prevented much display of her golden tresses, or of the symmetry of her head and bust, but the delicate mouth and the blue eyes came with a double and

instant charm upon you, and you felt thankful and content to wait for other revelations. Of middle height, her figure was full and rounded, and to-day her anxiety to meet her sister had given her step an elasticity which it did not usually evince, and had also imparted some addition of colour to her almost too pale complexion. A lovelier creature had seldom paced through those proud gardens, even in the days when they were consecrated to all that was noble and gay—and perhaps, even in those days of levity, never had a lovely woman walked towards the Fountain with more sadness at her heart, or better reason for such sadness.

Ernest dropped his paper at the right moment, recognised Mrs. Urquhart, and raised his cap. He noticed that her lips suddenly compressed, and then formed themselves into a half-smile, which had nothing in it beyond the stereotype courtesy of society. She would as soon have been without her charmingly-fitting gloves as without that smile when she met an acquaintance. That was all.

But not quite all in the case of Ernest Adair. Mrs. Urquhart's smile disappeared even sooner than usual, and in its place came a strange shade over the beautiful face. The effect was painful—it was really like that of the sudden fading away of sunshine from a bright river or a glowing flower-plot. The features themselves were not perhaps capable of much expression, but the whole face yielded to the sensation of the moment, and a story was told—one which there was no need to tell to the man who stood before her.

Stood, but for a moment. His only object has been told by himself, and that was already attained.

He passed her with a bow, and the ordinary words of greeting, and would have gone on.

But Bertha was a weak woman, and even while she feared, dreaded, almost hated, she could not bear to pass by the man whom she had so much reason to abhor. Before finally judging her, note her nature.

"Reading in the retirement of Versailles?" she said, with a forced smile and a slight laugh which was aught but cheerful, and had something in it that should have suggested pity—those who have heard such laughs often have spent a life which should trouble them when it comes to the ending.

"I was looking for English news," said Adair, in that artificial voice which implies a desire to forbear from any earnest talk—men are, perhaps, cowards when using it,—women, when they speak in it, are either to be feared or pitied, or both. "But I find," he continued, "news which affects friends here. Is this railway accident serious?"

"No, no, I believe not. I do not know. I do not understand such things. Mr. Urquhart has gone to the place."

"Let us hope that he will not be detained long."

And he was again about to pass on, when Bertha said, harshly:

"You received my note?"

"With the *gage d'amitié*. It is here," and he touched his finger, and pressed it to his lips. "All

thanks. But I must not detain you from your walk."

And then he passed on in spite of a word which still sought to stop him, and which he seemed not to hear. Perhaps he left the gardens, perhaps he entered the palace, and from some window gazed out eagerly, as many a jealous lover or furious husband may have done in the old days, for there is not a corner of that strange place but has clinging in it a story of a bad man and a foolish woman.

In a few minutes more the sisters met.

Words of affection, looks from moistened eyes, warm pressure to the heart—and Laura and Bertha were again, as of old, in council against the common enemy.

"Did you meet him?" was Bertha's first question.

"No. What, has he followed you here?" asked Laura.

"I spoke to him this moment. I thought that you must have seen us."

"It is the same thing for his purpose. He knows that you will have told me. O Bertha, Bertha, my darling, how we are hunted!"

And for a few moments the two women did look tearful and helpless enough, as they stood each holding the other's hand convulsively.

Mrs. Lygon was the first to speak.

"It must not last, and shall not," she said, brushing away her tears. "I have risked too much,—Oh! I know not what I have risked, but come what will of it now, this torture must be ended."

"Torture, indeed," said Bertha, "but what can we do? If I were rich, I might go on supplying him, though, since he has taken to play, I could never know where his demands would end. But whether Robert has fancied that I am extravagant, or whether he has calls upon him which make it necessary for him to spend less, I know not, but he has supplied me far less liberally of late, and I have been driven to strange devices to obtain the money."

"Nothing that would be—"

"Would be disgraceful if known, darling, you mean. No, not disgraceful—at least nothing wrong —I am told that other women do such things. I have no secrets from you. I have pawned a great many of my jewels."

"Dearest Bertha."

"Well, that would not be of much consequence, because I have enough left to wear upon any ordinary occasion, and Robert is not very likely to wish me to go to any grand place at present—he is so closely occupied with business that he scarcely visits anywhere, and always seems rather pleased when I refuse invitations."

"You *will* tell me everything? You have no reason to apprehend that he has the faintest suspicion."

"You make me tremble so that I can scarcely stand. You do not mean that you have heard anything that makes you say that, Laura?"

"Not a syllable, not a whisper, nothing of the kind. I spoke only on what you had said."

"Does anything I have said make you think that such a thing is possible?" gasped Bertha, trembling like an aspen-leaf. "It may be so, now you detect it at once, while I have been living in such a state of maddening and distracting unhappiness, that I can form a judgment on nothing. Do you see anything to terrify us?"

"No, no, Bertha; be calm, my love."

"I am certain you meant something."

"Indeed I did not."

"You have heard something, and that has brought you over so suddenly and secretly, and I am to flee. Oh, I cannot flee, my darling; if they hunt me to death I must die. I have no more energy, no more courage, and it would be much better that I were dead."

"Do not talk madly," said Laura, energetically, almost impatiently, pressing both her sister's hands in her own. "There is no new danger whatever, at least none to you."

"To whom then?"

"To me, perhaps; but we will not speak of that now. What I have done is done, and God will protect me through the rest,—at least I pray so. But we must be calm and rational, my dearest Bertha, and not bring the worst upon ourselves, when we may be able to avert it. You were speaking of your jewels."

"Oh, yes. I was saying that I did not care about their being sent away as I have told you, only that sometimes Robert lets a curious fancy come upon

him, and he asks me to come down to dinner with some particular ornament which he has given me. His memory is wonderful; and if he should happen to ask me to wear something which I have not kept back, I know not indeed, with my nerves in the condition in which they are, what I should say. His going away, even for a few days, is a relief."

"My poor Bertha, I gathered all this from the last note which you wrote to *him*."

"He has sent you that?" said Bertha, colouring to the temples.

"He gave it into my hand," said Laura, calmly. "Where and when, I will tell you by-and-by. But we have much to say to one another."

"We must not say it here," said Bertha, looking round, as if in terror.

"Not here, dear? Where can there be less interruption than in these quiet walks?"

"No, no. He may hear us. I know he will. He has spies everywhere—all round."

"You must exaggerate, dear Bertha. Your fears have made you create dangers where there are none."

"No, I tell you," said poor Bertha, sinking her voice to a whisper, although there was no one within a hundred yards of the sisters, "he knows everything. Why is he in the garden to-day? Only to show that he knew I was coming, and why."

"Impossible, dear child, unless you have shown him my note."

"No, that I have in my pocket, here—see."

Mrs. Urquhart felt for the note, and Laura saw her face blanch with agitation.

"No, I have not got it. He has it. He has taken it from me. I know not how, but he has it."

"How childish, dearest! How much more rational to suppose that, if you have really not got it, you left it on the table or dropped it on the floor. How shall I ever be able to help you if you are so wild?"

"I put it most carefully into my pocket, I tell you," said Bertha, "and felt that it was safely there, and yet he has managed to get hold of it. You may judge what sort of a life I am leading."

"I will not argue with you, dear, but I wish I were as sure of finding a bank-note on your table as my letter."

"Come home at once with me. Oh, not for that, but that we may speak in safety."

"Are we safer there than here?"

"Yes, yes. Come dear."

"I would come in a moment, but there is one thing I want to say. He hinted to me that you had been compelled to place confidence—more than you ought to place in any servant—in—"

"Henderson?"

"Yes, that is the name."

"There is nothing to fear from her."

"Bertha, she is in his power."

"There is nothing to fear from her. Do not speak more about it. I would tell you everything."

"You must, dear, now, for reasons which I will give you. Else all will be ruined."

"Well, come to the house."

"I will. But, Bertha, there is no fear of Robert's coming back while I am here?"

"None whatever. He will be away at least a week. But tell me, dearest, why should you object to see Robert? I thought that you admired him so much, and I am sure that he always had the highest regard for you."

"I will answer that, dear, when I tell you my whole story. Now, listen. It must not be known that I am at your house."

"Do you mean that the servants—Henderson knows you, of course, but not any of the others."

"What I mean is that you must put me into your little room, where I will live while I am with you."

"Yes, yes, certainly, love."

"And remember, Bertha, whoever comes, and I make no exception, dear—I am neither seen nor mentioned."

"That is all easy enough, but, my dear girl, what does this anxious charge mean? Who are you afraid should follow you?"

"It does not matter. Nobody must see me."

"Laura," sobbed out Bertha, "I *dare* not ask you whether there is anything that you are—that *you* are afraid to tell me—"

"Nothing, nothing," said Laura, in her turn colouring deeply, but with a far different reason from that which had crimsoned the face of her sister. "I will tell you all, but promise me that I shall be kept in concealment, come who may."

"Why, of course I promise. What is such a promise as that between you and me? But I warn you of one thing. *He* will know it."

"That I care not for."

"Then let us go. I know that he is watching us."

"To what end—to what good?"

"I know not, but it is so. Come."

And the sisters left the palace, and proceeded to the house in the avenue.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE house in the avenue was a handsome one, but the ground-floor was not used by the family of Mr. Urquhart. That portion of the mansion had been appropriated by its tenant to the reception of a chaos of models of bridges, viaducts, and the hundred and one specimens of tentative inventions dear to the civil engineeer, the walls being moreover covered with more or less dingy-looking plans, some of which had germinated into grand works that had suddenly called into life the dormant energies of half a dozen previously stagnant provinces—had bridged streams that for centuries had impeded the progress of commerce—had joined in an indissoluble marriage cities that were in a condition of mutual hate or sulkiness, but which, united by science, learned to know and value each other's abilities. The nursery of these devices was a gloomy one as needed be, and withal a dusty, for what architect or engineer but proclaims an undying war to the domestic broom? It would have been a bad day for the she-menial in Mr. Urquhart's house when she dared to enter those stern vault-like rooms without his special order. The suite of apartments on the first floor comprised dining and drawing-rooms, and a pretty little boudoir furnished with almost lavish richness. On the next

floor were the principal bed-rooms, and at one end of it, and over the boudoir, was the small chamber which Mrs. Lygon had desired might be assigned to herself. The sisters were admitted by Angelique, and in reply to Mrs. Urquhart's inquiry for Henderson, she was told that the latter had gone out to make some purchases.

The strictest not-at-home order having been given, the sisters were about to go up to the little bed-room, when Mrs. Lygon said:

"See whether my note is not here, Bertha."

Bertha shook her head, but Mrs. Lygon, passing through the rooms, and glancing at the tables in each, speedily detected the note lying on a chair in the boudoir.

"Here it is, dear," she said, with a smile.

Bertha looked at her earnestly for a moment, closed her own eyes, as if in thought, and then repeated the gesture of disbelief.

"Let us go up-stairs," she said.

Mrs. Lygon followed her in silence, and they entered the daintily furnished little room, which was adorned with a profusion of the elegant nothingnesses with which a feminine hand can turn a garret into a fairy temple.

"This must be my retreat, dear," said Mrs. Lygon, seating herself, and removing her bonnet, and letting her beautiful dark hair fall in masses upon her shoulders. "Now, Bertha, sit down, and let us take counsel, for indeed we need all the wisdom we have, to save us in this peril."

"And the children, Laura? How selfish you must think me not to have said a word of them."

"Not a word of them now," said Mrs. Lygon, with a quivering lip. "They are well. God grant I may be allowed—I tell you we will not speak of them now," she repeated, struggling with her sobs.

Bertha gazed on her in astonishment, but seated herself as desired, and had there been a third person present the contrasted beauty of the two women would have been a sight worth his recollection on many another day.

"We must not be overheard," said Mrs. Lygon, rising to close the door.

"Leave the door open, dear. It is always the best way."

"Where has she been learning that lesson of caution?" thought Mrs. Lygon, returning to her seat, with a melancholy look at her sister.

"I will shut the doors of the further room," said Bertha.

She did so, and came back, giving a furtive look round the bed-room. The look did not escape Laura, who immediately and suddenly threw back the curtain of the alcove bed.

"What thoughts you put into my head, Bertha," she said, almost reproachfully.

Bertha smiled—but such a helpless smile!

"Now, Bertha," said Mrs. Lygon, clearing back her hair from her forehead, and speaking in a firm under-tone, "listen to me. We must bring this persecution to an end."

"O, if we could," replied poor Bertha, feebly.

"If we could," repeated her sister. "It must be done. Whatever price we have to pay for freedom from it, the price must be paid."

"I told you how I am situated," said Bertha. "Whatever money—" Mrs. Lygon laid her hand on the hand of Bertha.

"I do not know that I am speaking of money. I wish that money would do, for there is no sacrifice which I would not make to obtain it. But I have the solemn and deliberate assurance from the man's own mouth that he will not be bought off, and that he prefers exacting a supply from time to time. He distinctly told me that he would never cease to persecute you."

"I shall die."

"Bertha," said Laura, "I will hear no words of folly from you. I have come to France with the determination to save you, if it be possible, and you must not let your terrors and fears get the mastery over you. You must help me. Heaven knows that I shall want all the help I can have, in a struggle with the most detestable wretch, as I believe, in this world. Now remember what is at stake, and be firm and rational."

"I wish I had your courage and spirit," sighed Bertha.

"I have neither courage nor spirit," said her sister, "except what may have come suddenly to me under the most dreadful pressure. I know myself too well. They will tell you at home—Arthur will

tell you, that I am one of the most timid and easily led persons in the world, and that his calm head and strong heart are my stay and support. I say this to you, Bertha, dear, because the same cruelty that seems to have given me strength to act ought to do as much for you, and because you must be true to me and to yourself. You will, I know?" she added, laying her hand kindly on her sister's.

"I will do what I can," said Bertha. "But what either of us is to do is a perfect mystery to me."

"I do not say that it is much clearer to me," replied Mrs. Lygon, "but it shall be, before many hours are over. I have heard of a poor stag, driven into a corner by the dogs, becoming desperate and dangerous, and if ever there were a case when two women might defend themselves, it is our case. It must be done."

"What must?" asked Bertha, astounded at the energy of the sister whom she had known from childhood as the gentle creature she had described herself.

"Whatever will release us, I tell you," replied Laura, in a low resolved voice.

"You begin to terrify me, Laura. Of what are you dreaming?"

"Dreaming is the right word," said Laura, slowly. "And we do things in dreams that we should tremble to think of, were we awake. We will call it a dream, but we will dream it out."

And she sat for some minutes silent and without moving eye or limb.

"Bertha," she said, after this strange pause, "ours is a case in which the right of self-defence against horrid wickedness leaves us free to use any means which may come to our hands. When honour and happiness, and not only our own honour and happiness, but that of those we love beyond all words, are brought into peril by such a miscreant as that man, I do not believe that anything we may do can be blamed. But let that be as it may, I have decided, or I would not be here, and I will be deterred by no fear, if our one great fear can be ended for ever."

"I can make you no answer, Laura," said Bertha, "I feel like a child in your hands."

"Answer me, then, as truly as a child would, dear. What do you know of his habits and associates?"

They spoke as if there was but one man in the world.

"Not much," said Bertha. "I see him but seldom."

"Ever in society?"

"Yes, and in society where I have been surprised to see him."

"Better than he is entitled to enter?—I mean if he were an honest man instead of what he is."

"In France, you know, it is not difficult for a gentleman, no matter what his means may be, to mix with a class that in England would not welcome a poor man, unless he were a singer, who came to amuse them, or something of that kind. But there

is another class here into which it is very difficult for a man without position to get, and even there I have met him."

"And well received?"

"Sometimes I have thought not, and then at other times I have seen him received with such marked attention, with almost more than is usual."

"Do you know any of his intimate friends?"

"Not one. But I think—at least I have an impression, that they belong to an inferior class. I remember one day in particular, we had been driving in the Bois de Boulogne, and for some reason Robert ordered the coachman to go home through some streets I did not know, and so we passed him. He was standing talking and laughing with two villainous-looking men, and had his hand on the shoulder of one of them—they were evidently low persons."

"Bertha, you know what I said he had told me about your servant."

"Yes," said Bertha, uneasily. "It is not so."

"It is not what, dear?"

"He said—or hinted—at least, you understood him to say that I was in some way in her—her power. You could not have understood him rightly. It is not so."

"Whether it is so or not," said Mrs. Lygon, "and we will speak of that presently—whether it is so or not, that girl is in *his* power."

"No, no," said Bertha, hastily. "It is entirely without foundation—I mean your idea. She is a

very good, honourable girl, and much attached to me, because I know her goodness."

"Bertha," said Mrs. Lygon, calmly, "I fear we shall not be able to work together. You are deceiving me."

"How? I deceive you, Laura! What do you mean?"

"You are a bad dissembler, Bertha, and I am glad of it. But you are very false to me now. I know that it is so—why not spare me the pain of proving it to you? I can."

"I do not understand you in the least," said Bertha, reddening.

"I suppose that my faculties are sharpened by danger," replied Mrs. Lygon, still preserving her calmness, "or I might not have noticed the uneasy looks which you have been casting that way,"—and she pointed—"while we have been speaking about him."

Bertha coloured, painfully, to her very hair.

"There," said her sister, "there ought to be nothing unkind between us. His spy is concealed in that wardrobe. Call her out."

Mrs. Urquhart burst into tears, and hid her face in her fair hands. Mrs. Lygon rose, and would have opened one of the wings of the piece of furniture in question, when the other opened, and Henderson stepped out.

She did not say a word upon the subject of her concealment, but, dropping a respectful curtsey to Mrs. Lygon, went over to the toilette-table, took a

bottle of perfume, and brought it to her mistress, at the same time giving her a handkerchief, and, in short, tending her in as orderly a manner, as if it were in obedience to a regular summons. Having done this, the girl was about to leave the room, when Mrs. Lygon stopped her.

"I wish to speak to you, with your mistress's permission," said Laura.

Henderson was all respectful attention.

"In an English village," said Mrs. Lygon, addressing her in a grave, kind tone, "there live an old couple who gave their daughter an education above her station, because they loved her better than she deserved. They had her taught French, and otherwise made her fit to be a lady's trusted attendant. They hope, some day, to see her again in their village, and to kiss her as the wife of some good, honest man—perhaps they hope to see her children growing up around them. It will be bad news for the old father, and worse for the old mother, when they hear that their daughter has become a street-walker in France."

Henderson's black eyes flashed out with fire at the last words, and her plebeian face became elevated in expression by the manifestation of her genuine indignation.

"It is false, Madame," she said passionately.

Mrs. Lygon took her seat, and, sorely constraining her nature, forced her beautiful mouth into a smile of as much contempt as she could manage to assume.

The smile stung the girl to the quick, as it was intended to do.

"It is false," she repeated, "wickedly false. You may sit there smiling, Madame, but it is false."

Mrs. Lygon remained silent.

It was the best course, for in a moment or two the girl flung herself upon her knees in a passion of tears.

"You will *not* go and say that in Brading, Madame. I am sure you will not. For you do not believe it, though you say it. Perhaps it has been told you," she added, her eyes again flashing through her tears. "You have seen somebody who has told you that, and he is a villain incarnate."

A throb of pleasure—no, of hope—passed through Mrs. Lygon's frame, and sent the blood to her forehead. But she retained her self-command.

Henderson continued to sob.

"It is false, false," she repeated, swaying herself about.

"You had better leave the room," said Laura. "I have said all that I wish to say to you."

"Never, Madame,—I swear that I will not go from the room, nor rise from this floor, until you tell me that you will not carry such a story as that with you to England. Say you do not believe it, and indeed you may."

Mrs. Lygon pointed to the closet whence Henderson had come.

"Yes, yes, Madame—dear Mrs. Lygon—yes, that was bad, wickedly bad in me, and you must despise

and loathe me for it, and you are right to do it. But not the other—it is not true. I swear it is not true," she said, clasping her hands with energy.

Need it be said that the Laura of England would have long since raised the girl from her knees, comforted her for that terrible word, and said what woman should say to woman, wrongfully accused.

But not so the Laura of France. She had her own to hold against a deadly enemy.

"Do you think," she said coldly, "that the word of a bad servant girl is to be taken against the word of a gentleman?"

Fire to powder. The girl sprang to her feet, clenched her hands, and was impotent to speak, through the potency of her rage.

Mrs. Lygon eyed her with a stern satisfaction. As for Bertha, she merely sat with her handkerchief to her face. It was one of the situations in which very weak people are simply out of court.

"The word of a gentleman," repeated Henderson, as soon as she could find utterance. "The word of a gentleman. No, Mrs. Lygon, he may wear fine clothes, and go among fine people, as Madame has said" (she was far too frantically in earnest to think of affecting hesitation to use what she had heard) "but he is not a gentleman, and you gave him his rightful name when you called him by the blackest name you could put your tongue to. And yet you would believe him sooner than me because he is called a gentleman by those who do not know him. No, you will not, Mrs. Lygon, I know you will not."

Henderson, thoroughly roused, came over to Mrs. Lygon, and again fell on her knees beside Laura's chair—actually ventured lightly to touch her hand. Had Laura played out her part thoroughly, she would have snatched away her hand as from contamination, but she did not do it, and the girl uttered a cry of triumph.

"Ah! you don't believe it—you do not, Madame, or you would not have let me do that; and if you ought to have believed it, never would I have dared. God bless you, Mrs. Lygon! God bless you! though it is not for me to say such a word."

And then came more tears.

"Mary Henderson," said Mrs. Lygon, and then the impetuous girl interrupted her, rising, however, and retreating to a decorous distance.

"Thank you, Madame, for letting me hear my own rightful name again. My name *is* Mary, and it was a bad time when I was fool enough to change it."

"Listen, then, Mary. You assure me on the solemn word of a girl of character, that there is no ground for my believing you worse than you have shown yourself to-day?"

The girl clasped her hands together, and assented with a vehement oath, which, it being in the nature of an ordeal, might perhaps be pardoned, but need not be set down.

"I shall return to England almost immediately, and I shall visit Brading soon after. I should have been glad to carry back an account of you which

would make the hearts of your parents rejoice. But that you have made impossible."

"But I will make it possible, Madame," cried Henderson, eagerly. "If you will let me, Madame, I will make it quite possible,—I mean if you will graciously let byegones be byegones. I know it is a bold thing to ask; but when a girl has been called a dreadful name—and I know, Madame, that it was put into your mouth, and let him that put it there look well to his comings and goings—"

Mrs. Lygon held up a finger.

"I beg your pardon, Madame," said Henderson, humbly, "for my low and dirty action. That is its right name."

"It is of your mistress that you should ask pardon," said Mrs. Lygon, watching earnestly the effect of the words, and pained, though not surprised, to see that the idea of Bertha's displeasure did not seem to impress the mind of her servant.

"And I do so, I'm sure," said Mary Henderson, but far less submissively than Mrs. Lygon deemed proper.

"I do not wish to hear anything," said Bertha, overcome by the whole scene, and helplessly shaking her handkerchief as if to wave away all appeal.

"And as I say, Madame," continued Henderson, again addressing herself to Mrs. Lygon, "if byegones might be byegones, and never shall they be repeated by me, and you would let me make amends, I can do something, and may be more than a little, in bringing to you some knowledge which you wish to have."

"What kind of knowledge?" asked Mrs. Lygon, quietly.

"Ah! yes, Madame. That is indeed like a lady —that is truly good in you to take me at my word, and let byegones be byegones at once, and forget what I was doing just now. But it is me that must remember them against myself," said the girl, with a more softened expression of face than her features had seemed capable of wearing. "I won't say more than becomes me, but you ladies wish to know something about a man whom you hate, as I was going to say, but that I ought not to say to ladies. But I hate him," she added, with a look that left no doubt of her meaning, "and if I can do anything to bring a house upon his head down it comes. And if I may not do it on account of others, I will do it on my own."

"I cannot say that your anger is wrong, Mary," said Mrs. Lygon.

"Indeed it is not, Madame," returned the girl, "and when I think what might have been the consequences, if you had gone back to England believing that wicked lie—"

[Which it will be remembered, Ernest Adair had never uttered.]

"I could drive my nails into my hands, Madame. But I will have my revenge for my good name."

"I can hear nothing about your revenge, Mary. Try to live so that all who know you may discredit anything that may be said against you."

"And I will, Madame. But I will have my

revenge first, begging your pardon for naming it again."

"Well, now, Mary, suppose you go down stairs. I shall have something to say to you presently, but I must first have some conversation with your mistress."

"Certainly, Madame."

And Mary withdrew, with a look which, while directed towards Laura, was chiefly expressive of a sort of grim gratitude, but which, as the girl turned to go, spoke most distinctly of a savage determination to wreak her wrong.

"Help comes when we least expect it, Bertha dear," said her sister, as soon as Mary had emphatically closed the most distant of the doors.

"I have no idea what you mean to do," said Mrs. Urquhart, who really seemed bewildered by the scene she had witnessed.

"No, I suppose not," said Mrs. Lygon.

"But you ought to be very careful," said Bertha, wisely.

"And I will," returned her sister. "Trust me, dear. Would you order something to be sent up to me, for I am growing rather faint, and let Henderson bring it?"

"Certainly, dear. I ought to have thought of it sooner."

People of Bertha's temperament have, it may be remarked, a habit of forgetting to think of the possible wants and comforts of others, but easily forgive themselves for what they euphuistically call absence

of mind—some people save a good deal of trouble and expense by that convenient furlough. However, Mary Henderson's zeal made up for any slackness on the part of her mistress, and Mrs. Lygon was tended with the utmost care and consideration. Henderson had much to tell her, and something to hear from her.

CHAPTER XIX.

But Bertha herself was doomed that day to sustain, single-handed, an interview of a far more embarrassing character. To sit and witness her sister's triumph, in the conversion of a hostile spy into a useful ally, was not an exertion that drew much upon her mental resources; but, about two hours later, and while deeply musing upon the questions whether she should dress for dinner that night, and if so, what dress she should wear, Angelique brought in the card of Mr. Lygon.

Mrs. Urquhart's mind, suddenly recalled from her toilette, was in such a state of bewilderment that she had already issued the slightly contradictory orders to admit him, and to say that she was in the country, when she found herself holding his hand, and declaring how glad she was to see him.

Arthur Lygon was in no mood to be critical upon his reception. He had hurried to Versailles, and thought only of again seeing Laura. He scarcely allowed his hostess time to falter out her welcome.

"And where is Laura?"

Poor Bertha strove to put on a surprised air, and, with a heightened colour, was about to reply, when Arthur's kind feeling, united with his eagerness to

meet his wife, hastened to save her from embarrassment.

"My dear Bertha," he said, taking her hand, and speaking low, "there is no need for any attempt at secresy. If I had been trusted sooner, I might have saved and been saved from great pain. But nothing need be said, dear, but this. Certain things—they need not be recalled"—and he looked away from her as he spoke—"have come to my knowledge, and my only complaint, as I have said, is that I was not trusted. Now, I have no complaint to make—*I know all.*"

With a gentleman's instinct, and in order to give his sister-in-law time to recover from the effect of such a communication, Lygon, pressing her hand kindly, crossed the room, looked from the window for a moment, and said:

"She is here, I suppose?" and he entered the little boudoir.

No, Laura was not there; but on the table was the note which she had sent to Mrs. Urquhart, announcing her arrival in Paris, and upon the writing the husband's eye immediately fell. He snatched it up, and smiled as he read it, and returned to the drawing-room.

Bertha was gone. Perhaps the best thing for the weak creature to do was to fly.

He was not surprised. For he had been pondering, of course, over the information which he had received, and it was by no means a pleasant thing to have to apprise a woman, who had hitherto been unsuspected

by him, that he knew of the errors of her early life. He was glad to have cut the knot in the abrupt way he had done so, and he concluded that though Bertha would not remain to continue such a conversation, she had gone to communicate it to Laura, who, in another minute, ought to be in the room.

Three minutes elapsed—perhaps five—and then, regardless of all the conventionalities, Mr. Lygon ran into the dining-room, and, finding no Laura there, mounted the staircase leading to the bed-rooms.

"Can she be afraid to meet me?" he said. "Laura afraid of me!"

And he opened the first door that he reached, half expecting to find Bertha and her sister crying together, and one urging the other to lose no time in coming down.

No, the room, Mrs. Urquhart's, was untenanted.

His hand was on a second handle, when Mary Henderson stopped him.

"Mr. Lygon, sir. That is my room."

"Ah, Henderson, how do you do. Where is Mrs. Lygon?"

The girl's quick eye saw that he held his wife's note in his hand, and her quick brain instantly suggested that it was useless to affect surprise at his words.

"Why, did you not meet her, sir?"

"Meet her—where, where?" said Arthur.

"Which way could you have come, sir?"

"Straight from the railway."

"Ah, but which?"

"How should I know? What do you mean? Is

Mrs. Lygon—. Stop. Don't be surprised, Henderson, but—"

Surprised or not, she saw the excited Lygon, breaking off short in his speech, rush in succession to each of the doors on that floor, and look into the rooms. He hastily penetrated into the little bedroom in which five minutes earlier he would have found his wife.

But she was no longer there.

Bertha had flown to Laura with his name upon her tongue, and the latter, certain that he would be stayed by no obstacle, had darted down a second staircase, Bertha following, but managing to say a word to Henderson, scarcely needed by her.

"Mr. Lygon, sir, if you would only listen."

"Where is your mistress?"

"In the drawing-room, sir."

"She is not."

"She went there, sir, directly Mrs. Lygon went out."

"Where is Mrs. Lygon," demanded Arthur.

"Mrs. Lygon has only gone into Paris for the evening. I thought that you would have met her at the train, but whether she went by the right bank or left bank I am not sure, and you do not know which you came from."

"What do you say about the evening—where is she gone?"

"I—I am not sure, but Madame knows."

Again Arthur Lygon had searched the rooms, but the result may be imagined.

"Mrs. Urquhart must be in the house," he said, sternly, "and I must see her. Find her, Henderson."

"But she was here five minutes ago," said Henderson.

"Where's Mr. Urquhart?"

"He is away from Paris, sir; there has been a railway accident, and he was sent for."

"Find your mistress."

He paced the apartment in a state of mind which may need no description.

"I cannot find Mrs. Urquhart," said Henderson, after delaying as long as she thought was safe. "I have not seen her since she said good-bye to Mrs. Lygon, and Angelique believed her to be here, as she was when you came in."

"Has she taken flight, too?" said Lygon in passion.

Henderson was silent, the remark not being addressed directly to her.

"Do you say that Mrs. Lygon is expected here again to-night," he said, in a calmer voice.

Henderson, left without directions, scarcely knew what to say. If she replied in the affirmative, Mr. Lygon, evidently an unwelcome guest, would naturally desire to remain and await his wife's return. A contrary answer would make him still more determined to see Mrs. Urquhart. So rejecting fiction altogether, she resolved on adhering to the truth, and stating that she did not know. This left him to decide for himself.

"Bertha might well desire to keep out of the way," he said to himself, "after what I had said to her. It would be strange if she did not. But why could she not have spoken of Laura? However, I am on her traces now, and I will not lose them again."

He put a variety of ordinary questions to Henderson, as to the time of his wife's arrival, the room she occupied, and her state of health, and then, dismissing the girl, he wrote a brief note to Mrs. Urquhart, in which he begged her to let him know when Laura was expected back, and her address in Paris.

"Get this into Mrs. Urquhart's hand as soon as you can," he said, "and if you have the answer ready for me when I call again in half an hour, this shall be doubled." He put a gold coin into her hand as he spoke, and went out.

But Mary Henderson had no opportunity of earning the additional wage which he had offered. The sisters were fairly away from the avenue, and Bertha had led Laura through an obscure part of the town, and into a quarter where an English stranger was not at all likely to penetrate. Nor for many gold coins would Mary Henderson, under the influences which then guided her, have done anything which could offend or embarrass Mrs. Lygon.

Arthur Lygon walked rapidly hither and thither, in the neighbourhood of the house, and though irritated almost beyond bounds at the chance, as he thought, that had prevented his meeting Laura, did not entertain an idea that she was voluntarily hiding

from him. The girl had played her part so naturally and promptly, that Lygon had no cause for suspicion, while the disappearance of Mrs. Urquhart was easily accounted for. But he made his half hour a short one, and soon had his hand again on the bell.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that I have not been able to find Madame. How or when she could have gone out, I cannot think, but she is certainly not in the house."

"She must come in sooner or later," said Lygon. "I will wait for her."

"Very well, sir."

"Will any one be here to dinner?"

"No, sir," said Henderson, quickly. "Madame dined very early, with Mrs. Lygon."

"I shall wait."

He re-entered the drawing-room, and the faithful Henderson retired to consider how this new difficulty could be met. It was evident to her mind that neither of the ladies would return to the house while they thought Mr. Lygon was there. But where could they go? and how inconvenient to have to hurry out into the miserable Versailles. Perhaps though, they might actually have departed for Paris. But then, what was to be done with Lygon?

A brilliant thought flashed upon her mind, and in another minute she, too, had left the house.

Lygon paraded the rooms in irritation, and yet scarcely knew how to affix blame anywhere. Accident had gone against him. But it is small consolation, in trouble, to have nobody to blame.

He had passed another hour in this state of mind —which made the period seem treble its length— when Mary came in again, in haste.

"A young man, sir, has come with a message."

"From whom?" said Arthur, eagerly.

"From Madame. Enter, Monsieur Silvain."

Arthur Lygon had not much attention to bestow upon the small, wiry-looking, intelligent Frenchman thus introduced, but at once demanded his news.

In brief, which was not the way M. Silvain told it (for he wished to distinguish himself in the eyes of his mistress), M. Silvain had been at the railway terminus, inquiring after some perfumery which he had ordered from Paris, when Madame Urquhart, to whom he was well known, had called him to her, and had requested him immediately to present himself at her house, and acquaint the strange gentleman from England that she had gone to Paris, following the strange gentleman's wife, and that he was, if he pleased, to come on to Paris also, and a letter should be sent to him, to the Hotel Marié, Boulevard des Capucins, telling him where to find them. M. Silvain was desolated not to have been able to come sooner, but his perfumery had not arrived, and he had been obliged to send a special messenger after it.

It was a well-learned story, but what is the use of a lover if he cannot learn anything his mistress orders! It was a bold falsehood, but what is the use of an ally who is timid? At any rate it sent Mr. Lygon away from Versailles.

CHAPTER XX.

Letter from Archibald Vernon to Charles Hawkesley.

"*Canonbury Square.*

"My dear Charles,

"I am sure I do not know why we see so little of one another, except that having carefully examined the map, having discovered that between your new house and my Patmos, there is exactly distance enough for an agreeable and healthy walk, and having solemnly agreed with myself that duty and pleasure alike enjoined my coming to visit you at the earliest opportunity, I have not found that opportunity. With your merciless business habit, you will harshly demand what on earth I have to do that should prevent my putting on my hat any fine morning, and marching across to Maida Hill. This stern question I might find it difficult to answer—and yet not difficult, only you hate long letters, and I cannot write short ones. You will, I foresee, hand this letter over to Beatrice, with instructions to find out what her father wants, and tell you when you come out of that hermetically sealed study for the glass of sherry and biscuit that are to fortify you for another onslaught upon some less fortunate author, another act of the new comedy, another chapter of the

forthcoming novel, another column of proof that some king of the earth ought to be promptly deposed. My dear multifarious son-in-law, I want you to be good enough to read this letter for yourself.

"Thank you much for the books. Indeed I ought to have thanked you long ago. I have not read them, but Beatrice's pretty paper-knife has been at work on them, and I propose to begin them one of these days. I hear you, sir, and procrastination is a long and sonorous word, and is also the thief of time. Never mind. Let me go on in my own way. I admire, but do not envy you regular men, who do everything at the proper time, and are always to be relied upon. I got my notions of literary labour before the new type of author came out, and I am now too old to change my habits. Perhaps, if I had been more of a man of business, I should have been dating to you from my own villa, and sending you this letter by my own servant, instead of writing from a boarding-house, and hoping that the maid will not omit to stick on a penny stamp when it shall please her to take my epistle round to the post-office. But if I am not a man of business, I have been made what I am by the discouragements of life, and by the oppression of people who resolutely set themselves to keep me down. Had my wife's aunts been less bigoted, and had they advanced a sum to get me out of my troubles, I might have been heard of more advantageously, for I own that I do not find that the men who make great successes in these days are my

superiors in handicraft. I hear you again, sir, and egotism; though a shorter word than procrastination, has almost as classical a sound—

[At this point in the letter, Mr. Hawkesley looked up, and in answer to a curious glance from his wife, observed:

"Only autobiography at present, but he wishes me to read it all."

"Dear old man!" said Beatrice, "and so you shall."]

"The papers, Charles, are very full of interest—

["I wish he had to find subjects for leading articles," grunted the journalist.]

—and it is my opinion that a very important crisis is at hand. [Another grunt.] When we look at the condition of the Western World, it is impossible not to perceive that there is an upheaving among its populations, both in the northern and southern continent, which must ere long result in some remarkable events. If we turn to the East, and inquire—

"You are skipping, Charles; you are not reading it all.'

"My dear child, am I to be kept from my desk to inquire into the Eastern question?"

"Why, you were writing about it yourself yesterday—you told me so."

"Nothing of the kind. I said the Great Eastern question."

"It's all the same. No, but do read it, dear, when he asks you."

"You really merge your conjugal in your filial duty, Mrs. Hawkesley. But let us see."]

—and inquire what will be the ultimate destiny of the interesting nations on the seaboard of the Mediterranean, I cannot but be struck with the utter indifference displayed by the world in general upon a topic of such magnitude. For my own part, I have quite made up my mind that the shores of the tideless sea will be the scenes of some very extraordinary events in the time that is coming, and I wish that you, who have the ear of the public, would write more strongly and urgently than you do. I observe with regret, that you and others are far too prone to accept existing things as if they were in themselves good; and that in place of denouncing much that you are convinced is evil, you are inclined to exhort people to make the best of things as they are. This policy is entirely erroneous, and there must be a general tempest-sweep throughout Europe before society can hope for regeneration.

["I am sure the dear old thing writes very beautifully," said Mrs. Hawkesley.

"Who's a denyin' on it, Betsy Prig?" returned her husband. "But one has heard all this before from him. It is a regular manifesto—a Vernon Gallery of contemporary history. What is he meditating?"]

"I have been thinking of writing to the managers of a literary institution in this neighbourhood, to inquire of them whether in the event of my making up my mind to prepare some lectures on the existing

state of Europe, they would be inclined to negotiate with me for their delivery.

["Thinking of writing to inquire whether if—come, that is worthy of Sir Robert Peel, deceased."

"Tell him so, dear, that will please him, I know. He used to speak highly of Sir Robert Peel. Was it not Sir Robert Peel who said every man had his price?"

"Sir Robert Walpole said something like it."

"O yes, it was Walpole. But he was a Prime Minister, I know."

"Quite right, my dear."

"If you laugh, I will box your ears. I am sure it was a good guess."]

"If I decide upon writing, I shall ask you to give me your opinion upon the terms, and the best way of dealing with the subject, for I have not had much experience of such matters; and, indeed, if you would not mind taking the initiative, and writing in your own name to ascertain about it, and arrange, I should have nothing more to do except—

["Except to ask me to write the lectures."

"I am sure that he does not mean that. And if he does, you will just not do it, dear. You have a great deal too much work on your hands as it is," said Beatrice.

"Likely to have, while people spend unheard-of sums on bronzes," said Mr. Hawkesley, glancing at a little figure on the mantelpiece.

"You great story-teller!—it's worth five times

what I gave for it, and the man said that Lord Corbally would jump at it."

"There is no Lord Corbally, so his gymnastics must be indefinitely postponed. But we won't re-open that question, the figure is lovely, and was very cheap, and I am delighted with it."

"Now, I will just change it to-morrow," said Beatrice.

"Pray don't, or I will buy another—be awfully cheated—get something you don't like—and refuse to say where I bought it. Listen to your father, if you please."]

"There is, however, no immediate hurry about this, and indeed it might not be altogether amiss to wait, and see what results from the negotiations which I find are likely to be set on foot about the Archipelago, and which I shall watch with very great interest. So we will let this subject stand over until I can see you on it, and explain my views more fully.

["So all the letter, thus far, was unnecessary?"]

"I do not know, indeed, that I should have written to you to-day (for I have picked up a very curious tract, dated 1790, upon the French Revolution, and I am very anxious to finish it), but that I have received a letter which has caused me very great uneasiness.

["What is that, dear?" said Beatrice.

"Well, it cannot be much to alarm one, when he brings it in after the Mediterranean question and the French Revolution."

"But that is his way. It always was. He would talk about a dozen things before coming to something serious. It was not levity, but he always disliked to touch anything disagreeable."

"So do I," said Hawkesley, putting his arm round his wife's waist, and reading on.]

"Uneasiness. I had not heard for a long time from Laura, nor have I had any of Walter's scribble, which he is so fond of sending to grandpapa. But I did not think much of this, for I am not the best correspondent in the world, and I may not have answered their last despatches.

["That would not have prevented Laura from writing to him," said Beatrice.

"Of course not. His mentioning it is only another instance of what you were just saying—his dislike to get to the facts."]

"I had fully intended to go over to Gurdon Terrace this week, and see after them all, but it has been very hot, and my light coat had gone to be mended, and one thing and another interfered. But last night I received a letter—

["Last night, and written at once. It must be something to have stirred him to such promptness," said Hawkesley.]

—which I had better enclose to you instead of recapitulating its contents.

"Where is it?" said Beatrice. "Let us read that at once, and hear his comments upon it afterwards."

But there was no letter enclosed.

"Just like him," said his daughter. "Just exactly like him."]

"When you have read this, return it to me, with your own ideas as to what it means, or what should be done. As for the 'impending evil,' and the 'duty of watching over Laura's children,' the language is perfectly incomprehensible to me. You may, perhaps, make a better guess at its meaning. Has there been any epidemic about Brompton? I regret to say that I have not paid the attention that I ought to the interesting and valuable reports of the Registrar-General, but that functionary frequently makes allusion to diseases of a painful character, and the details grate upon my nerves. You may, very likely, be better informed than I am, as I know that you frequently write upon sanatory subjects. If anything of this kind is the case, I think that you should at once send or write to Laura, advising her to remove into some other neighbourhood. I could wish that she liked this district, as I am sure it is healthy, and she would be near me, which would be very convenient to me, but this I would not unduly press, though you might more properly urge that consideration.

["I am sure I shan't advise her to go and bury herself at Islington," interjected Beatrice. "But I cannot think what he is talking about. How ridiculous to leave out the only important thing."

"I will send over for the letter he intended to enclose."

"Yes, do. Stop, I will go myself," said Beatrice.

"You will not be going out? I will not stay there ten minutes. Is there anything else?"

"Not much. He hopes that we will attend to the matter directly, and let him hear soon."]

"I shall write to you again very soon, and with love to Beatrice, and kisses to the children;

"Always yours affectionately,

"ARCHIBALD VERNON."

"Beatrice," said Hawkesley, "go by all means, and do not lose any time in getting back."

His wife instantly detected a certain gravity in his tone.

"Charles. Why do you say that?"

"I will tell you. I do not think I am giving way to a mere fancy, or I would keep it to myself; but is it not odd that neither Arthur nor Laura sends us a line from the country?"

"That has crossed my mind. But I told you what Price said."

"Yes. But however interested they may be about the condition of their friend, and I cannot make out, after all, who it is that is so ill, one of them might have written. I wonder whether Price has heard."

"Send there, while I am gone to Canonbury."

"I have a good mind to walk over."

"Well, if you can spare the time, do; and tell the boys to come to-morrow."

"I cannot well spare the time, and yet I should like to know. It is so unlike Lygon not to send a line."

"Perhaps the lady is dead."

"Very likely, and we are fidgetting about nothing. But I confess that I shall be pleased to hear that all is right."

"But what *can* be wrong, dear?"

"I do not know. But the letter which your father meant to enclose has followed so closely upon some vague thoughts of mine—however, dear, put on your bonnet, and I will send for a cab. I will not go out until you return."

"I was only inclined to be angry with papa for his carelessness, but you have put that out of my head," said Beatrice. "You have not heard anything?" she said, earnestly.

"Would I have kept it from you, darling?"

When Mrs. Hawkesley reached Canonbury Square, she found Mr. Vernon comfortably reclined upon a sofa, reading the newspaper. Robed in his dressing-gown, and slippered, and with a handsome smoking-cap upon his head, the slight and refined looking old gentleman rose to salute her with a very kindly smile.

"You did not expect me, papa?"

"Indeed, my dear child, I did," he said, pleasantly.

"After what you sent, you mean, papa?"

"And after what I did not send."

"What is this letter, and how could you forget it, when it was so important, papa?" said Mrs. Hawkesley.

"I did not forget it, my love. I was about to enclose it, when it occurred to me that if I did not put it in, I should certainly have the pleasure of seeing you here as soon as possible, and so I kept it out."

"Leaving us in such a state of uncertainty. What is it? Where is it?"

"Impatient as ever, my dear. It is in my desk in my bed-room, for one has no private room here, and in the fine weather I write at my window, which gives me a view of the trees."

"Will you get it, or shall I run up?"

"I believe that the room is being arranged by the domestic—"

"What does that signify, dear? Please get it."

"I know you of old, my dear, and that to obey is the least trouble where you are concerned," said Mr. Vernon, leaving the room with another smile.

He returned in a few minutes, declaring himself unable to find the letter, at which announcement his daughter's impatience was manifested with little restraint.

"Not find it, papa—you cannot have half looked."

"Yes, dear, I have managed to mislay it. The fact is that we—I mean myself and two gentlemen who are staying here—got into an interesting discussion last night, and perhaps we grew too warm, at least they did, for I will never affect to be only half in earnest on subjects of political importance. We separated in some heat, and—"

"But what has a ridiculous political squabble to

do with an important letter about Laura?" said Beatrice, irritated. "Never mind that; tell me who the letter was from, and what was in it."

"My dear Beatrice, I wish you would emulate your husband's calmness and patience."

"He was as angry as myself that you had left out the letter, and would have been more angry if he had supposed that you had done it on purpose. But what is it—you can tell me what was in it. Who was it from?"

"That, my dear, I certainly cannot tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because it is anonymous."

"Oh, an anonymous letter," said Beatrice; "that is a relief."

"I don't understand why, my dear—"

"Yes," said Beatrice, impetuously, "because any one who could send an anonymous letter is a creature whose words are not worth a moment's attention, except to find him out and punish him."

"I do not feel entirely with you, my dear," said Mr. Vernon, blandly; "I think such a view is common-place and even coarse. I can quite understand that a person may be desirous that a fact should be known to another person, and yet may not wish to be known as the informant. If, of course, he states falsehoods, he is an unworthy person, but in simply laying a truth before another, and yet remaining shrouded, he may only wish that the truth should be looked at, abstractedly, and

without the colouring derived from the other's possible opinion of the writer."

"An anonymous letter-writer is a wretch," returned the prompt and unconvinced Mrs. Hawkesley; "and to think of such a one writing to you about Laura? What *did* he say, papa?"

"You beg the question of sex, my dear; but from my own impression of the letter, which I much regret to have mislaid in the way I was about to explain to you, I am inclined to think the writer was a lady."

"Not a lady, certainly. A woman, perhaps."

"Waiving that aristocratic distinction, my dear, I would say that the hand was very neat, and of the kind which is usually supposed to denote education."

"And the words?" asked Mrs. Hawkesley, compressing her lips, and filially trying not to be in a rage with the author of her being. "What were they?"

"I will not affect to quote them accurately, but the main point was what I mentioned in my letter. I was recommended to watch over Laura's children, as some danger—as a heavy evil—was impending over them."

"And that was all?"

"No. I was further advised to visit Gurdon Terrace, and endeavour to ascertain, if possible, where Mrs. Lygon had really gone, as the writer had very good reason to believe that there had been an endeavour to place everybody on the wrong scent —or something to that effect."

"I must have that letter, papa, directly, if I ransack the house from top to bottom with my own hands. How very wrong in you not to have sent it us."

"I do not know where else to look for it, my dear. And I may as well add," he said, with some firmness, "that if I could lay my hand upon it at this moment, I do not yet know that I should feel it my duty to give it you."

"I am sure you would. Charles would do his utmost to have the writer traced out."

"For that very reason, my dear, I am not clear that I should not be betraying the confidence of a person who had written to me with the best intentions."

"What, and accusing Laura of deceit!"

"I do not read any such charge, my dear. The allegation is that there is deceit somewhere. Were the accusation more specific, I do not know that I ought to hand over the writer to the unreasonable anger of others, even though they are members of my own family."

"I have no patience with such hair-splitting, papa."

"I am aware, my love, that patience is not exactly your *forte*, nor do you seem to have cultivated it much."

"How can you speak so coolly, when such a charge is made against Laura? She is all truthfulness, as you know. Do you mean to say that you in your heart believe that she is gone anywhere but

where Arthur says she is? I never heard anything so wicked in all my life."

"I have no means of forming any opinion on the subject, my dear. I am very little consulted by my children as to what they do, and I cannot tell what Arthur's course in life may be. Perhaps he has got into difficulties."

"I am sure he has not," returned she indignantly.

"As upright men as Mr. Lygon have done so," replied her father; "nor need you repel the suggestion with so much violence."

"You make me quite angry, papa, when you talk in that wild, fanciful way, at the same time imputing the worst things to the best people whom you know. You do not care what you say. Was it all a fancy that the letter hinted something about the neighbourhood being unwholesome, or an epidemic being about,—what was it you wrote?"

"No, there was a word in the note that put the idea into my head. I cannot positively say that there was anything to lead to a definite impression on the subject."

"It was only a wild guess of yours, then? But, papa, you must really have that note found, or I shall have to ask Charles to come over and convince you that he must have it. In Arthur's absence Charles is bound to see after his interests."

"I shall be very happy to see Hawkesley, my dear, and to argue with him on that or any other subject. In the meantime you must allow me to

take my own view of what is right. If there is anything of truth in the letter, why not act upon the information, in any way that circumstances may dictate, without reference to the writer herself?"

"You are actually defending the wretch, and making yourself a party to her accusation."

"No, my dear, I am only refusing to permit my natural feelings as a father to predominate over my sense of justice to a fellow-creature."

"Well, papa, you will hear what Charles thinks about it; but it is very unkind of you to place me in such a position. I have to go back to my husband, and tell him that my father takes side with a cowardly, anonymous letter-writer, and has more regard for this skulking creature than for the feelings of his own children."

There were tears in her eyes as she spoke, and the heart of the father began rapidly to soften. His theories seldom stood long in presence of the sorrow of those whom he loved.

"Nay, Beatrice, my dear, you are quite wrong, and you do me much injustice. I do not think you ought to avail yourself of my affection to induce me to act unfairly."

"It is not unfairly," said his daughter, seeing her advantage, and taking his hand. "And I am sure you would not make us all unhappy for the sake of a malicious stranger. Get me the letter, papa dear," she added, giving him a kiss.

"You are going to be so angry with me," said Mr. Vernon.

"Angry, papa dear? You know I am hasty and apt to say anything that comes to my tongue, but I never mean to be unkind. Forgive me if I spoke rudely, as I know I did." And she gave him another kiss.

It completed her victory, but the victory was not a very profitable one. Mr. Vernon began to look rather foolish, and he said in a sort of whisper,

"What if I cannot give it you?"

"I know you can,—I know you can find it if you like, dear."

"Well," said Mr. Vernon, "if I had it, I would give it you with all my heart; but the fact is, Beatrice, I knew that though my views were right, yours would conquer, and in the fear of that I—I burned the letter."

And he had done so. But may it be supposed that our readers have some idea whence the letter came?

Not until Mrs. Hawkesley had signified an affectionate forgiveness of his act was she allowed to depart, and though she could not help giving him what she described as a good scolding, the father is not unhappy who, in these days of liberty and equality, has never heard more unkind language from his child.

CHAPTER XXI.

AGAIN did Ernest Adair and the girl Henderson meet in the little room at the inn at Versailles. But this time the manner of the master was entirely altered. He neither threw himself upon a chair, nor had he recourse to his favourite cigarette, but the moment that Henderson entered the room, he signed her to close the door; and then, approaching her hastily, he addressed her almost with sternness.

"Now, say at once what you have to say. My time is precious." The girl's manner was as much changed as his own. Instead of employing the petulant, half-defiant tone in which she had resisted or resented his questions on the former occasions, Mary Henderson was as submissive and respectful as if he had been her lawful master, demanding from his own servant an account of her doings.

"Will you ask me anything, or shall I speak without?" she said almost humbly.

"Both. Tell me your own story first, and then answer what I ask."

"I managed to hear a conversation between Madame and her sister."

"Only one?"

"It was impossible for me to hear more, and I do not think that they have had any more."

"Don't talk to me about impossibilities. The other thing is more to the purpose, and what makes you say that they have had one talk only?"

"Because Mrs. Lygon did not see her sister again until bed-time, and then Madame was not in the bed-room with her for more than two or three minutes."

"What! Not see her at dinner?"

"There were visitors at dinner, and Mrs. Lygon had a tray sent to her own room."

"Was she ill, or only anxious to avoid strangers?"

"I did not hear anything about her being ill. She ate her dinner, I know."

"Very right to notice that. I shall make you valuable in time. Mrs. Lygon evidently wishes not to be seen here. Well, now, go on. What was their conversation?"

"It was partly about yourself, Mr. Adair."

"Not improbable. Well. They spoke bitterly of me, abused me, called me fiend, as you did? Tell me. I can bear it."

"They said that you were a bad man."

"Quite right. Go on."

"When they dropped into whispers I could not very well hear, because I was a good way off; but I had no difficulty in understanding that you have been making Madame give you a great deal of money, and that you want more."

"Come, I see that you are telling me the truth," said Adair. "That is an accurate report of an accurate statement."

"Madame does not know how to get more money for you."

"Well," said Adair, listening intently.

"Mrs. Lygon has not got much."

"Go on, girl."

"But," said Henderson, "they agreed that the money must be raised in some way."

"Sensible and practical women."

"They mentioned various plans for raising it, but none of them seemed to suit, for reasons which I could not well make out. But there was one way which they seemed to agree would do if some things could be got at which they called—I did not know the name, and I wrote it down afterwards—"

"Good girl."

She took a scrap of paper from her pocket, and glancing at a pencilled word, said,

"Yes; do you know what *coupons* are?"

"Most certainly."

"Well, then, they are to be got at, and as I made out, they are to be handed to somebody who will pay money for them. And this is to be given to you."

"With any conditions, did you hear?"

"Oh, yes. You are to be asked to live in London."

"Unheard-of cruelty. You are sure of that?"

"Yes, I suppose—indeed, Madame said something about gambling, and I suppose that they want you to be out of the way of it."

"There being no gambling in London. That is very thoughtful and provident of the dear ladies."

"I do not think that it was out of any kindness to you, but because it is wished to put you out of the way of people who cheat you and send you to worry Madame."

"Did they say that?" said Adair, and a flush of anger for once showed itself on the pale features. He could bear all the abject humiliation of his position, all the self-contempt, even the taunts of such persons as Henderson and his other tools, but he was wretched at being described as a dupe of cleverer scoundrels. "They said I was cheated?"

"Yes," said the girl, with woman's quickness, perceiving that she had managed to sting him. "Mrs. Lygon laughed at the idea of your being any match for the Frenchmen, and said that it was hard that money, got with so much difficulty, should be lost clumsily."

"You are lying," said Ernest Adair, quickly.

"You had better listen for yourself, if you doubt me," replied Henderson, with a touch of her natural petulance. "I beg your pardon, but indeed I am telling you the very words."

"It may be so. It had better be so. Well, and in case I do not choose to live in London, what do they propose?"

"Nothing was said about that, and I suppose they think that you are in such a desperate condition that you must accept the money."

"Ah! I have impressed that pleasant belief on them, then? And who is to obtain these coupons?"

"Madame."

"And the other lady is to use them?"

"I think so."

Adair turned round upon her, and gazed in her face for some moments. Her eyes met his steadily for the first few seconds, and then she dropped them from before his fixed look, and said:

"I have angered you, and learned some of your secrets, but it was not my fault; you put me on the business."

"You have not angered me in the least, I assure you," was his reply. "On the contrary, you bring me very good news, and you shall not fail to have your reward when I receive mine. By the way, I suppose that we shall both have to wait some little time."

"Madame was urgent about making haste."

"And the other was not."

"She is so calm and reserved, I can hardly make her out."

"How did the conversation end?"

"Madame was to get the—the—things as soon as she could."

"How you forget the word, although you took the pains to write it down, which so fixes a thing in the memory. Are you sure that you have the right word?"

"Quite right, quite right."

"Look again."

"I know I am right."

"Look again, I say."

Somewhat more slowly than seemed natural, Henderson took the paper from her pocket, glanced at it again, and was about to replace it.

"Yes, I said so, coupons."

He snatched her wrist, and though her hand closed on the paper, he forced open her fingers and took the paper.

"How absurd you are," he said. "Where my interests are so much concerned, is it strange that I should desire to be rightly informed? Are you ashamed of my seeing your way of spelling a French word—and has not Silvain completed your education?"

He looked at the paper as he spoke.

"Yes, you were quite correct," he said, gently, "quite."

She rubbed her wrist, with an expression of pain, and the tears came to her eyes.

"What, was I rough? Nay, I cannot have hurt you. I should never forgive myself. There, there, don't be angry. You have done your mission admirably, and I repeat to you, you shall not lose your reward. Well, I need not detain you. I will send for you when I want you again. Take that napoleon, and buy a ribbon for the pretty wrist I have so ill-treated. And do not expose me to the wrath of Monsieur Silvain."

He pressed the coin into her hand, and opening the door, rather urged her departure—she this time seeming inclined to linger.

When she had gone, he fastened the door, and examined the scrap of paper carefully.

"That is not the scrawl of a lady's-maid," he said.

Then from an inner pocket he took out two or three letters, and compared their writing with that on the paper he had seized.

"Time has passed," he said, "and hands alter. But I believe that it is hers. And they are laying a trap. Henderson was to remember the word, and it was written down for her, before she was sent with the pretty story. What do they want me to believe? That Madame means to rob her husband's strong-box of some valuable documents in order to pay me? But, on the other hand, why should she not do it? The scheme would be a very sensible one. But that infernal scrap of paper; and why would not the girl give it me? Let me balance my convictions."

A business which the reader will gladly leave him to perform alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

After a fruitless search for the hotel mentioned by Silvain, as that at which a letter would be left for Mr. Lygon, the latter, whose nature was unsuspicious, endeavoured to retain the belief that a hasty message had been misunderstood, and that the Frenchman had accidentally directed him wrongly. But the sorrow, the excitement, and the irritation which Arthur had gone through since his wife's departure from England began to tell upon him, and some darker thoughts than he had ever before admitted to his mind took the place of the frank and unsuspecting feeling with which he had been in the habit of receiving the statements of others. The transition was unfortunate for his own happiness, for a nature like his, once warped, often proceeds to subtleties of distrust and suspicion which tinge subsequent life with a gloom that no conviction can ever entirely dispel. The steel once tarnished may be polished never so carefully, at times the spots will re-appear upon the blade.

He lost little time in returning to the avenue.

Expecting that Mrs Urquhart might be denied to him, he had made up his mind not to leave the house again until he had had an interview with her. But her part had been assigned to her, and Lygon was at once admitted.

Bertha rose, gave him her hand, and spoke before he had time to address her.

"Arthur, what must you have thought of my unceremonious flight?"

"I might understand that, Bertha," he said, almost sternly, "but not the absence of another, whom I come back to see. Where is Laura?"

"That is what I have to tell you, but pray do not agitate me, for I am very ill."

"You have only to answer a question."

"First I must tell you that Henderson is out of her wits with alarm at the terrible mistake she has committed. She caused her French lover, Silvain, to deliver to you a message that was never intended for yourself, and which must have taken you to Paris on a useless errand. The blunder was, I believe, his rather than hers, and the message was for a friend of Mr. Urquhart's, a gentleman who has been hunting him up about some railway business."

Lygon looked at her with a keen glance.

"It matters little, Bertha. All I want at this moment is to see Laura. Where is she?"

"She has gone into Paris—Henderson says that she told you so."

"Where in Paris?"

"I am not to tell you."

"Bertha, what kind of an answer is that?" said Lygon, turning white with anger.

"You may frighten me to death," said Bertha, crying, "but I can make you no other."

"Is it—do you dare to tell me—that my wife has given you this injunction?"

"I do not say that, but I am not to say more."

"Bertha, beware what you are about! The woman who lends herself to help a separation of man and wife incurs an awful responsibility."

"It will all come right," sobbed Bertha; "but do be patient."

"Are you mad, Bertha? Patient, with a wife whom I loved better than my life, suddenly abandoning her home and her children, and hiding herself from me, as if she were criminal? I command you to disobey any orders, and tell me where my wife has gone."

"You—you have no right to command me," stammered Bertha.

"No," said Lygon, more calmly. "That is true. But Robert Urquhart has a right, and he shall exert it."

The tone of his voice was merely expressive of determination, but Bertha's conscience read menace in it, and she suddenly sprang to his side, and fell on her knees.

"No, no, Arthur. For God's sake, spare me. He will kill me."

"What can you mean?" replied Arthur Lygon, astonished.

"Nay, I know what *you* mean," said Bertha, clutching at his arm. "You came here prepared to use your power."

"My power," repeated Lygon, in sincere bewilderment.

"You told me that you knew all," said Bertha, agitated. "But I implore you, Arthur, spare me."

Lygon's mind was too painfully filled with his own trouble to comprehend hers for the moment. But as her meaning dawned upon him, he raised her from the ground, and said—there was both indignation and kindness in his voice—

"I am ashamed to understand you, Bertha. More ashamed that you should be able to think such a thought of me."

"You do not mean to reveal to Mr. Urquhart—"

"Silence, Bertha, for very shame! What have I done to deserve such a question? Why, have I not found my only comfort in believing that Laura has foolishly come over here in order to serve you in some mysterious way, and what other belief could make me forgive her wild step? I wish to know nothing but where I can find her. Tell me that."

"If I refuse, you will call on Robert to compel me?"

"You will not refuse."

"Indeed I must."

"And your reason for refusing?" said Lygon, trembling with passion.

"That I must not say."

"Bertha, I will have an answer, even if I am driven to demand it through your husband. I will ask him for nothing but that simple answer. It will

be your own act if he, in obtaining it for me, asks why Laura has come here."

"She did not come on my affairs," said Bertha, in an undertone.

"What!" cried Lygon, fiercely. "Nay, you are not speaking truthfully," he added, in a gentler voice.

"You have a right to insult me," said Mrs. Urquhart, piteously.

"Neither right nor wish," was his reply, "but you must not play with my feelings. Let me hear the truth from you."

"So you do. It is not on my business that Laura has come over, but on her own. I swear it to you."

"Be it what it may," said Arthur, "I am upon her traces, and I must find her. There is no time for soft language, Bertha. I must know where she is, and I once more demand it of you."

"You will compel me to speak," gasped poor Bertha, terrified. "There is no kindness in your voice now—"

"Nor in my heart, nor will there be until I am satisfied."

"He will kill me," muttered Bertha.

"What is this madness?" he replied, angrily. "You are only asked to give up a secret that you have no right to keep. Five words between us and we part for years. Tell me what I ask—but beware of deceiving me again."

"Again?" said Bertha, looking up at him with tearful eyes.

"You are talking to gain time," said he, impetuously. "Do you think I believe that your adroit servant made a blunder in the message? Now, the truth."

"Laura is on her way back to England."

"To her home?"

"I do not know."

"Am I to believe this?" said he.

"Shall I swear it to you?"

"No," said Arthur, with a certain cynicism of tone which struck on the heart of Bertha.

"I understand you," she said. "You *think* that —that an oath would have no terror for me. But you are wrong, and I am telling you the truth now. Laura is returning to England. You cannot follow her to-night, for the last train has left. Look at the paper for yourself."

"Mrs. Urquhart," said he, with a strong effort suppressing all manifestation of feeling, "I must hear more from you. I have a right to ask more, and whether that be so or not, I do ask more. My own heart furnishes me with excuse for aught that may seem harsh, and I can bear to be trifled with no longer. Tell me the business which brought my wife to France."

"I do not know, I do not know," repeated Mrs. Urquhart.

"That must be false. You have no secrets between you."

"This is one, Arthur. If I made a guess I might deceive you, which I have no wish to do—"

"Well," said he, thinking a gleam of light might be afforded him.

"It may be—I almost suppose it is—something about my father."

"About Mr. Vernon?"

"Yes. When he came over to France during his troubles, he was engaged in a dark plot against the Government.. I never understood it, but there were oaths and secrets, and the police knew all about it. From what Laura has said, and it was very little, I think that she has been summoned on a matter of life and death, but more I know not. I do know that she has accomplished her business, and is returning."

"I have no means of knowing whether you speak truthfully or not; but remember, your story will be tested in a few days."

"Do not threaten me until you find I deserve it."

"It will then be too late for threats," said Arthur Lygon. "Remember that; and if you are withholding the truth from me, you have still an opportunity of setting yourself right."

"I have told you all I know," said Bertha, "except Laura's address in Paris, and that would be of no use to you, because she will have left before you could reach it."

"That is true," said Arthur. "Still give it me, as proof that the rest of the story is true."

Bertha took a card from among several that lay in a China basket, and gave it to Lygon. He saw that it was a woman's card, with an address, and placed it in his pocket.

"There are no more trains," Bertha repeated. "You will stay here to-night, though it will be sad for you, Robert being away, and my being so ill. But we will make you as comfortable as we can."

"I thank you, Bertha, but no. I shall be off by the earliest train, and it would disturb your household. I will sleep in the town here, and trouble no one. Farewell. If you are behaving loyally to me now, I shall have an opportunity of saying to you—or, better, of showing you that you retain a friend, although—"

"Although Laura will be ordered never to see or correspond with me again."

"I am too much in the dark to speak of the future, but no one as yet has had a right to call me a harsh judge. What I may be under disloyal treatment, I know not."

"If you knew all, Arthur, you would indeed pity me."

"Indeed I do, and should, if I only knew that you were a wife who dares not tell her husband every thought of her heart. I do indeed pity you, Bertha."

"Laura tells you every thought of hers," said Bertha, holding his hand.

"I believed so. I believe that she will do so. When I believe that she ceases to do so I shall have no wife. Farewell, Bertha."

He pressed her hand, and went out into the now lovely summer night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

When Mrs. Hawkesley had departed on her visit to her father at Canonbury, her husband, after making short work with the end of an article in which the House of Hapsburg was strongly, yet affectionately, recommended by him to set itself in order at the earliest opportunity, started for his walk to Brompton, to visit Laura's children. But a man must mind his own business, more or less, whatever may be happening to his friends, and in the Park Hawkesley encountered the manager of one of the pleasantest of the London theatres.

"Stand and deliver!" said Mr. Aventayle. "I see a manuscript in your pocket, and of course it is the piece you have promised me so long. This is not exactly in your way from Maida Hill to the theatre; but perhaps you were going to read out to yourself *sub tegmine fagi?*"

"This is not a manuscript," said the author, laughing. "Do you think I would trust myself with valuables in solitary places where managers and such like walk about? This is a kaleidoscope, which affords you a good opportunity for introducing an appropriate quotation—

'Each change of many-coloured life he drew.'"

"But he—meaning you—did nothing of the sort.

There's no getting anything out of you. I suppose you do not care about money."

"Not the least. If I take it, that is only for form's sake. I write purely to do my fellow-creatures good."

"Do me some, and give me a good piece," said Mr. Aventayle. "We want it particularly just now."

"Just now I am particularly busy, my dear Aventayle."

"Of course you are. But, come, promise, and then I shall get it."

"I cannot say, to a week, when I can take it up."

"I don't want you to say to a week—say it to me. *Laughs*," added Mr. Aventayle, mockingly quoting a stage direction.

"If you can make such epigrams as that, you might write your own pieces," said Hawkesley, "and not try to demoralise me by giving me such work. But walk with me this way, that's a good fellow, for I have a call over yonder to make."

"What, at the French Embassy? Going to ask the Ambassador for the loan of a few French plays," laughed Aventayle, a gentlemanly and accomplished man, out of whom not even the troubled politics of management had been able to make what the necessity of self-defence makes of a good many of us, both in and out of management. They walked on in companionship.

"Nonsense apart, Hawkesley, I should be very

glad of a piece from you just now. We are getting capital houses to the *Bright Poker*, and long may they last; but I want to be ready with something else the moment that flags."

"I can't write Bright Pokers. I am a moral man, and the father of a family."

"There's nothing immoral in our piece, come, young virtuous. You have not seen it."

"I have, three times."

"More shame to you, if it isn't correct. Shows your real nature. But the fact is, there is not an objectionable word in the whole thing."

"No. But the plot is simply an illustration of how a married woman can conceal a disgraceful intrigue by the most enormous lying."

"Ah, and don't she lie well? But it's a French notion, and French morals are admitted *duty* free."

"Very neat, but proves nothing, except, as I say, Aventayle, that you ought to write your own pieces."

"I prefer paying you. And I don't pay badly, do I, come?"

"No, on the contrary. But let us see, you have been debilitating your company, haven't you?"

"No such thing; so there's not that excuse for you."

"I saw in a paper that Mrs. Dumbarton was leaving you."

"Well, she doesn't attract, and she doesn't play half as well as she did."

"You thought differently at Easter."

"Certainly, because she was then coming to me, and now she's going away. If she comes back at Christmas, I shall be prepared to think about her as I thought in March, namely, that she is a capital actress, and a very disagreeable woman. That is the only change in my company, Hawkesley of Maida Hill."

"No, no, Salter told me that Miss Pinnock was leaving you."

"Salter lied. Miss Pinnock some time ago got from her Catechism to her Marriage Service, and the result may detain her at home for a moon or so, but she will be quite ready to play your young lady. Any other mean excuse for not getting to work."

"Well, I'll look up some jottings I made for a piece, and let you know whether I see my way in it."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Aventayle, taking out a memorandum book. "You will state to me here, with your foot upon your native park, and your name McHawkesley, what day I am to receive the first act. Now, let me write it down."

"You shall have the first when you have the rest. They say women and fools ought never to be allowed to see anything in an unfinished state, and though you are neither woman nor fool, I have a prejudice for extending the rule to people who have to get up a play."

"My dear fellow, I should not think of looking at your manuscript until I got the whole of it. But I

like to have an instalment under lock and key. When will you hand over the whole?"

"Don't tie me down, that's a good fellow. I'll not lose time."

"Will it be a full piece?"

"Yes, I will use as many of your stars as I can, never fear."

"None of your scoffs. It is the best company in London, which is the reason, Mr. Hawkesley of Maida Hill, why I apply to the best author to write for it. Give me an idea of the scenery, and I will set Vister to work."

"Well—first act, before a gentleman's country-house."

"Manly sports on the lawn, greased pole, and leg of mutton, running in sacks, and all that. Or, I say, take it into Scotland, and let the tenants be putting the stone, tossing the caber, and so on. The Highland dresses will look well."

"Keep such things for your pantomimes, sir, and don't seek to degrade the drama. Upon second thoughts, I don't mind some targets, and girls in archery costume, only your girls are such guys."

"I tell you that you don't know the company. Little Fanny Tudor is as pretty a girl as is on the stage, and then there's Maria Lincoln, come, and Julia Greening, come, and Loo Fennell, come. If those girls are guys, I wish it was fifth of November all the year round."

"I forgot your resources. Well, make a pretty house, and a lawn, and have Fanny, and Maria, and

Julia, and Loo taught some shooting, and I will let you know about the second act as soon as I can."

"But make it as great a contrast to the sunshiny lawn as you can. You couldn't lay the next scene down a coal-pit, could you?"

"And end with an explosion of fire-damp, and call the piece 'Davy's Lamp.' Thank you."

"Hm," said the manager, "many a good word is spoken in jest, and if I don't have a fire-damp explosion before long—never mind. Do you copyright the suggestion."

"No, I present it to you."

The manager, with a look of affected solemnity of the most awful description, made a note in his pocket-book.

"By the way," he said, closing it, "I have something else to say to you, which is also of a professional kind. I have had a piece sent to me by a man whose name I never heard, but the drama is full of good stuff, only crudely put together. I have a strong notion that it would do, but it wants manipulation. Would you give it a look over, and see whether you agree with me? If you would do the necessary work to it yourself, of course it should be worth your while, but, anyhow, look it over."

"Send it me. Who's the man?"

"His name is Adair. Probably a *nom de plume*. But he is a very smart fellow, and has a genius for 'situation.' Also he writes a beautiful hand, which is more than can be said of every friend of mine."

"Distrust any man who writes too good a hand, that is, a hand in the least degree better than mine."

"I shall be happy to distrust him; but if you think as well of his piece as I do, I shall also be very happy to play it."

"Then you can give me a couple of months longer for mine."

"Not an hour. If you were ready to-day, I would underline it to-morrow, and I will on Monday, if you will give me the title. There is confidence."

"Assurance, you mean," said Hawkesley, laughing. "But I'll think of you. I am going to call in Gurdon Terrace, on some little people."

"Will you like to give them a box?" said the good-natured Aventayle. "I dare say I have got one."

"Sorry you have any to give away; but I will take it notwithstanding, as they are too young to be hurt by your Bright Poker. Thanks."

They parted, and Charles Hawkesley went on to Lygon's house.

"Uncle Charles!" cried Fred, with a great shout, as his friend entered. "Walter," he bawled at the top of his lungs, "here's Uncle Charles!"

Walter was immediately heard jumping downstairs half-a-dozen at a time, with intermediate jumps at the landings.

"Easy to see that mamma and papa are away, Master Walter, by the way you come down. How are you, my boy?"

"Oh, all right," said Walter. "How's aunty?"

"Very well. Will you come to us to-morrow, and spend the day?"

"I will," said Fred, promptly.

"Who asked *you?*" said his uncle, laughing.

"I had rather not come, uncle," said Walter. "Papa and mamma might come home while I was away."

"And don't you think they could bear to wait for you till night?"

"Yes," said Walter, his eyes filling with tears, "but I couldn't bear to wait for them."

"My boy, I dare say it is lonely for you," said Charles Hawkesley, taking his hand, "but of course they will soon be back."

"Have you heard from them yet, uncle?" said Walter, anxiously.

"Well, no; but the reason for that of course is, that as they must be coming home so soon they don't think it worth while to write. Don't you think so, Price?" he said to the domestic, a very respectable and kindly-looking woman—just the person to be left in charge of children, and extremely unlikely to invoke any form of Bogey to aid her.

"That would be a very good reason, sir," she said. "Could I speak to you for a moment?" she added.

"Certainly, Price. I'll come to you boys directly; stop here in the dining-room," said Hawkesley, and he went into the little room with the servant.

"I beg your pardon for taking the liberty, sir—"

"No liberty, Price. What can I do?"

"You said you had not heard from master or mistress, sir."

"I have not, nor has Mrs. Hawkesley, and I thought that Mr. and Mrs. Lygon might have returned, and I walked over to see. Anything wanted that we can do?"

"I hope you will not think me overbold, sir," said Price, closing the door, "but there are some very strange things going about, and I would not for the world they should come to the ears of the dear children; and if you did not think that my mistress would be back soon, and it would not be putting you out of your way, it might be best for them to stop at your house with their cousins."

"That was what I came to tell them, but certainly not for any reason like yours. What do you mean, Price?"

"You have heard nothing, sir, about my mistress?"

"Nothing, except that her father accidentally mentions in a letter that he has not heard of her, or from Walter, lately."

"That's Mr. Vernon, sir?"

"To be sure—who else?"

"And it was he," said Price, "who came here late last night. I judged as much from the description."

"Came to see the children!"

"No, sir, they were in bed, and I had gone out

to get some things in. Mr. Vernon came in a way very unlike a gentleman—I mean he rang the servants' bell, and when Eliza answered it, he only said he wished to know if all was right. She did not know him, and thought there was some trick of a thief, so she very properly put the chain up, and let him speak across it. He asked some curious questions which she did not quite understand, and said we were to write to Canonbury, which gave me the clue."

"But there is nothing to be uneasy about in that. He evidently did not wish to alarm anybody, but wanted to satisfy himself. He is an odd man, but very kind-hearted."

"I cannot see why he should ring the servants' bell," persisted Price.

"Perhaps he took it for the visitors' bell."

"Maybe, sir, but I cannot say I like appearances," replied the domestic. "However, that would not be much, one way or the other, and I should not have felt it my duty to speak about it, if it had not happened to tally, as I may say, with what you said."

"But you spoke of strange things, Price. There's nothing very strange in a grandfather coming to inquire after his grandchildren, ringing the wrong bell by mistake, and frightening a girl who did not know him."

"No, sir, there is not. But I wish that was all. The tradespeople in the neighbourhood have heard something else, and it has been brought to me.

I only wish it could have been kept to me, and I know I used that language to Eliza, for repeating some of it, that a woman should not use to a young girl unless she richly deserves it."

"I know well, Price, that you would be as much vexed at any false rumours that affected the house of your master as he himself could be."

"I hope so, sir, for he and my mistress have been as kind as kind could be to me, and mine I may say, for Mr. Lygon got my half-brother Henry a place on the railway; and as for my mistress, when I was ill, no sister of her own could have been better nursed. And there ought to be a law for making people hold their tongues, unless they can prove it," said Price, getting a little confused in her usually excellent English.

"Prove what, Price?"

"Sir," said she, in a lower tone, "I don't believe a syllable of it, and if it were true, there is something at the bottom that we know nothing about; but I believe it to be all a wicked lie. But some of the tradespeople that we deal with have had a hint that Mrs. Lygon will not come back."

"I should like six words with any of them who have dared to circulate such a slander," said Hawkesley, "and you will tell me their names."

"It is very strange, sir, that three of them should all have heard of it at once, that is Turton, the baker, and two others. But what is strangest is that Watkins, the grocer, should have heard it, because we have dealt with him only for about ten

days, and my mistress has been there only once, with Miss Clara."

"That would certainly look as if—but, Price, you may speak frankly to me, indeed it is your place to do so. What do you understand to be meant by 'not coming back?'"

"Well, sir, people who like to spread such stories are generally cowardly as well as base, and take great care what words they use that may be brought against them. I dare say that if my mistress were home to-morrow, as I heartily hope she may be, and anything was said to one of the tradesmen about the report, he would pretend to be horridly shocked at being accused, and swear that he had never dreamed of such a thing, and very likely want to punish any poor servant who had mentioned what he said. But a good deal can be said without many words. I am ashamed to repeat such a thing, sir, but the story is that Mrs. Lygon has gone off with a gentleman."

"Run away from her husband?"

"It comes to that."

"What scoundrels these fellows must be! One wonders that their own interest does not shut their mouths."

"I thought of that, sir, but it seems the notion is that Mr. Lygon will give up the house and go away, so there will be not much more to be got out of us. But not a shilling from this house shall be spent in any of their shops again, unless my mistress chooses to do it after she has heard of their slandering tongues."

"Well, Price, you know as well as I do that the story is a confounded and malicious lie, and we will think hereafter about punishing those who have dared to spread it. Meantime you had better adhere to what Mr. Lygon told you, and say, from me if you like, that as there is no change in the condition of the lady whom your mistress went to visit, she has to remain in the country."

"That I certainly will, sir, and gladly."

"And for fear such a notion should reach the children, I will take them back with me. Send them over a carpet-bag to my house with what they will want for three or four days. I trust that their mother will be back, before that, to see after them."

"It would be too bold in me to ask you, now I have told you everything, whether this news breaks on you for the first time, sir?"

"Price, you are a faithful and trustworthy person, and deserve every confidence I can place in you. Your mistress has no more gone away with a gentleman, in the sense in which these rascals use the word, than you have, but I have a reason of my own for thinking that she has made an enemy of a very bad and malicious person, who has somehow heard of her absence, and takes advantage of it to spread lies. When the time comes, we will punish that person in a way that shall satisfy everybody. Meantime, we must be prudent."

"My mistress have an enemy! I am sure, sir, that she has never done anything to deserve one."

"Never, but that is no rule, Price."

"I will pack the carpet-bag for Master Fred, sir, and Master Walter, if he will go."

"What makes you think that he will not wish to go?"

"You heard what he said, sir."

"Ah, yes; he is a very good affectionate lad, but he must not stay moping here, especially under the circumstances."

Mr. Hawkesley intimated to the boys that they should accompany him to Maida Hill. Usually such an announcement from him was a subject of exultation, for in addition to the enjoyments of his cheerful house (one in which, as Mr. Vernon had written, there was a hermetically sealed study, which prevented Hawkesley from being the terror and bugbear of everybody who played a tune or laughed a laugh during the author's hours of work), the evening was often made brilliant by a visit to some theatre, and the still more exquisite delight of a manly supper with uncle at some oyster-room or other place of terrible Sybaritism.

"Would you take Fred, uncle?" said Walter, "I had rather stay at home."

"My dear boy, your parents would much prefer your coming to us."

"They have not told you so, uncle."

"No, my dear Walter. But you must be quite sure that your aunt and I know what would please them."

"I think you only say it in kindness, uncle,

because you think that we are dull here. Fred is, and I wish you'd take him off; but I am not dull at all, and I am writing out something that I know papa will like."

"But you can write at my house as well as here —better, as you have said more than once, sir, don't you recollect?"

"Ah, that was in the days when this house was happy," said Walter, bursting into a paroxysm of tears, and throwing himself into his uncle's arms.

"When this house was happy," repeated Charles Hawkesley, holding the sobbing boy kindly, and striving to calm him. "Why, this house has always been happy, and is going to be happy for many a long day to come. What can you be thinking of, Walter?"

"Will she ever come back?" faltered Walter, shaken with his agitation.

"Mamma. Why, of course she will. What has put such a strange idea into your head? For shame, Walter. It is a baby's question when its mother goes out of the room, not the question of a schoolboy who reads Eutropius."

"Whisper, uncle," said Walter, clutching Hawkesley's hand convulsively, "and don't let little Fred hear. A boy I know told me that it was all about London that mamma had run away."

"And where did you hit that boy?"

"Aha!" said Walter, with a sort of spasmodic laugh, and a proud smile through his tears; "he was thirteen, but that didn't help him, uncle. I

blacked his eye, and as for what he got in the mouth, look here," and he showed his knuckles, which were still bleeding.

"Sent him down, I hope."

"He fell down and wouldn't get up, and I kicked him soundly. I hope it wasn't cowardly, uncle, to kick him when he was down, but it wasn't my fault that he wouldn't get up. A butcher said it was right," added the boy, pensively and gravely.

CHAPTER XXIV.

On the day following that of Adair's interview with Henderson, at which he had extracted the scrap of paper from the reluctant hand of the lady's-maid, Ernest, who had taken up his quarters at the little inn at Versailles, received an unexpected visitor. This was M. Silvain, who presented himself with considerable sternness of manner. The symptom was not lost on the observant Adair, but he had his own reasons for being very little affected by any bearing in the usually polite and deferential perfumer.

"Ah, the dear Alphonse!" said Adair, in French, the language in which their subsequent conversation was conducted, and which Adair spoke with perfect facility.

M. Silvain bowed slightly, upon which Adair rose, mockingly returned an elaborate salute, and then resuming his seat, proceeded to make a cigarette.

"I wish to be favoured with your attention, Monsieur," said Silvain, coldly.

"You have it, my good Alphonse. Have you discovered a new hair-dye, or does some confiding victim to your last invention in that line threaten you with the tribunals?"

"I am not here to *badiner*, Monsieur."

"Is that a grateful answer, when a friend anticipates your griefs, and prepares to solace them?"

"Before we separate you will need another preparation, M. Adair."

"For my hair?"

"I forbid you to jest at my profession, Monsieur, or on any other subject at the present moment."

"*Diavolo!*" said Adair, opening his eyes. "Let us hear more, and shall I order you some absinthe? It is very bad, but you are accustomed to deleterious liquids."

"I repeat to you, M. Adair, that I forbid jesting."

"Well, if you will neither be consoled nor treated, the tribune is to you. Speak."

"I had thought you, M. Adair, with certain drawbacks, for which I know how to make allowances, a man of honour."

"I swear to you that I have kept your secrets. Nobody has learned from me how you colour the violet pomade. I only refuse to use it."

"You seek to enrage me, M. Adair, but you have already done so more effectually than by your coarse taunts."

"Enraged you, Alphonse!—you, the pattern of all that is soft and amiable. Nay, then I am a wretch indeed, and miserable to the lowest extent. *De profundis* I implore you to tell me my crime; only break it to me gently, knowing the feminine tenderness of my heart."

"The word is well chosen, M. Adair, by a man who commits a brutal outrage upon a woman."

"And who has done such a truly shocking thing?"

"You yourself, Monsieur, and in this very apartment."

"I begin to think, my fabulous Alphonse, that my hospitable offer of refreshment was something more than superfluous, and that you were wise to decline it. I would not presume to dictate, but I think that the interests of our trade may suffer if we indulge too freely in the sensuous pleasures, at least during business hours."

This was said very indolently, and the punctuation supplied by light puffs of smoke.

"Your insolence, Monsieur, will not deter me from the purpose I have come for," returned Silvain, who, though pale with anger, preserved much composure of deportment.

"I should be very sorry to deter you from anything, my dear Alphonse," replied Adair. "I cannot charge myself with habitually keeping you out of mischief. But tipsiness is such an exceedingly objectionable frailty, that a friend's ardour may be pardoned."

"A friend, M. Adair. That name is never again to be used between us."

"Exactly as you please, Alphonse. Perhaps you are right. Real friends need no parade of their affectionate sentiments."

"In this apartment, M. Adair, you dared to permit yourself, yesterday, to outrage a woman whom you were bound to treat with respect."

"You are rather a tiresome *raconteur*, Alphonse. You told me this just now, with a slight deduction. A narrative should advance—and one would think a perfumer understood fiction."

"It is no fiction, Monsieur. Do you dare to deny having wrenched from a young girl's hand a certain paper?"

"Suppose I denied it?"

"That would be a fresh insult, because you would charge her with a falsehood of which she is incapable. Do you know that?"

"Indeed, M. Silvain, with all apologies to you, I know of no falsehood of which any female is incapable."

"The sentiment is worthy of you, M. Adair. But spare yourself the unnecessary trouble. Mademoiselle Matilde has informed me, somewhat reluctantly, of your conduct, and I am here."

"Well," said Ernest, emitting a large puff of smoke.

"Had you been the man of honour I had supposed you, this conversation would have been needless."

"It is."

"That is false, Monsieur. It would have been needless, for you would at once have made your reparation, and charged me with apology. I do not observe that you are in the slightest hurry to do either."

"Did you ever observe me in the slightest hurry about anything?"

"Again, I repeat, Monsieur, that I will not be provoked into anger, and I invite you to take the course which is due to the young person you have injured."

"I have injured nobody, and you are a fool, Alphonse."

"We shall see presently, M. Adair."

"As you please; but I warn you that I was reading something much more pleasant than your conversation, and I may easily be fatigued by a repetition of your absurdities. Have some absinthe, and go away and become tolerable."

"I may have the misfortune to fatigue you without much conversation, M. Adair. But I prefer to act in the first place with consideration. You deprived Mademoiselle Matilde of a paper."

"What, again?"

"You will, at once, deposit that paper in my hands, first placing it in this envelope." And he produced one from his pocket."

"This envelope," said Adair, affecting to smell it, and then tossing it at Silvain, "is so infernally scented with bad millefleurs, that I must protest against touching it again."

M. Silvain's eyes sparkled with rage.

"I produce the envelope, Monsieur, because, although I shall return the paper in question to Mademoiselle, I refuse to be thought to have seen the writing upon it, or to have become acquainted with her least secret."

"Chivalrous Alphonse, worthy to have been chris-

tened after Spanish royalty! But your scruples are in excess. There was but one word on the piece of paper, but I half suspect that Mademoiselle's curious French has made you think there was some allusion to yourself or your calling. Tranquillise your mind. The word was not *couper*, but *coupon*."

"Monsieur, you are a dastard."

"You should not say that, when I have been bold enough to permit you to shave me. I have had wounds from your awkwardness that testify to my bravery."

"You may have others, ere long, Monsieur."

"That is, I think, the third time that you have darkly hinted at some scheme of personal vengeance, my dear Alphonse. You force me also into the bad and dull habit of repetition, and constrain me again to say that you are a fool."

"Enough, and more than enough, M. Adair."

"The interview is at an end, then. The fates are merciful."

"Perhaps not," said the Frenchman, suddenly rising, and leaving the room, and as hastily returning with a long wooden box, which he placed on the table.

"Ah, now you interest me," said Adair. "The dialogue was really flagging. Now we have novelty. And what is that box? You have some new invention, after all, only you meditated an amiable surprise for your friend. Come, no more mystification. Is it a monster bottle of home-made Eau de Cologne?"

The Frenchman quietly unlocked the box, took out two small swords, and threw off his coat.

"Eh!" said Ernest Adair, affecting pleasure. "That is charming. Two real swords. Did you buy them a bargain, to be cut up into scissors? Well, any improvement in your French cutlery is to be hailed with ecstacy."

But while he spoke his eye was vigilant, and his foot firm on the floor, and ready for a spring, should Silvain offer sudden violence.

The Frenchman had no such base intent. He placed the box on a chair, pushed away the table, so as to leave the centre of the room free, and calmly offered Adair his choice of weapons.

For a moment it crossed Ernest's mind to snatch both, but the next instant he smiled and took one of the swords.

"This looks the prettier handle," he said, without rising, "but both are very nicely cleaned, and do credit to our crystal scouring powder, *breveté*. What next?"

"Next, defend yourself, Monsieur," said Silvain, retiring, and taking up his position in a very determined manner. "The door is behind *me*," he added, for the first time letting a taunt escape him.

"I am obliged by the counsel and the information," said Adair, still keeping his seat. "But are you sufficiently insane, M. Silvain,—and as you repudiate intoxication, observe the ready charity that offers you another excuse—are you sufficiently

insane to suppose that I am going to fight a hair-dresser about a lady's-maid?"

"We will not talk, M. Adair. You have long since waived all the considerations of rank, even if I allowed them. You have insulted a young person whom I esteem, Monsieur, therefore defend yourself."

He looked so determined as he spoke, that Ernest thought it prudent to rise, in order to repel any sudden attack, but he did not advance upon his antagonist.

"This is a gentleman's reward when he condescends to fraternise with *canaille*," he said, with calm impertinence.

"Fight, and do not talk," replied the Frenchman. advancing upon him, with the most evident intention of doing his very worst.

Ernest instinctively fell upon guard—the blades crossed—and M. Silvain's sword, like that of the Corsair, made fast atonement for its first delay. He attacked Adair with downright fury, and any one thrust which he delivered would, unparried, have worked important change in the subsequent destinies of several persons with whom the reader is acquainted. But Adair, retaining his cigarette between his teeth, coolly parried every lunge, without making a return.

"How long," he said, as M. Silvain, baffled in a vigorous onslaught, retreated for a moment, and glared vengefully at his antagonist, "how long is this delightful assault of arms to proceed?"

"Until one falls, Monsieur," cried M. Silvain, anew advancing to the combat. Ernest smiled.

But the most cold-blooded man is roused sooner or later by the persistent efforts of another to do him mortal harm, and, moreover, there is something in the rapid clash of steel that fires the soul of the swordsman. Another desperate effort of Silvain's to get home, and Ernest had no longer the paper in his teeth, but had set them, and with a very evil eye was keeping deadly watch on that of his enemy. Adair was rapidly forgetting how inexcusably foolish he would be to derange all his schemes for the sake of punishing a petty shopkeeper, and was on the very point of leaving the defensive and lunging his best when the voice of Mary Henderson was heard hastily asking whether Mr. Adair was within.

The sound operated differently on the two men. Adair instantly recalled his better judgment to his aid, and, still watching his enraged antagonist, did not return his thrust. But the voice of his mistress roused the lover to heroism, and he felt that he would have given his own life to let her see her enemy stretched on the floor between them. Thirsting to finish the duel, he rushed at Adair, delivered three or four rapid and desperate lunges, and laid himself open to a thrust that, had Adair pleased, would have speedily ended M. Silvain's life, love, and woes. But Ernest (as will have been perceived), a practised and skilful fencer, did not so please; but at the instant Mary's hand was on the door, he suddenly performed one of the feats known in the art; and

as the girl entered, she had the satisfaction of seeing her lover, with a wrenched wrist, glaring with anger and discomfiture at Ernest, the sword of Silvain having flown to a distance on the floor.

"And I had forbidden you," said Mary, reproachfully, to Silvain.

"Forbidden him to give me a fencing lesson, Mademoiselle?" said Adair, as calmly as usual. "That was indeed cruel, for he is so good a master of the sword that I profit greatly by his teaching."

The girl looked searchingly at her lover, conceiving from the expression of his face and from his being defenceless, that he might have received a hurt, the rather that Silvain was too mortified to speak on the instant.

"He has not stabbed you?" asked Mary, vehemently.

"What a word, Mademoiselle!" said Ernest. "We do not stab, except under very exceptional circumstances. M. Silvain is perfectly unhurt, and I hope will pardon my awkwardness in knocking his sword out of his hand."

He picked up Silvain's weapon, and replaced it, with his own, in the box, which he quietly locked.

Meantime Mary was administering in an under tone that mixture of reproach, consolation, and affection which woman has ever ready for him whom she loves, and Silvain, with his hand in hers, was almost comforted for his defeat by the unwonted kindness with which his usually rather undemonstrative mistress caressed him.

"But I ordered you not," she added.

"I thought of you, and could not obey you," said M. Silvain, tenderly and epigrammatically.

"And now, my dear Alphonse," said Adair, cheerfully, "let me renew my offer of absinthe. After a fencing-lesson one requires refreshment. What say you, Mademoiselle? You must teach him to take care of himself."

"And I will," said Mary, firmly, and leading her lover from the room, whence he certainly did not depart very triumphantly.

"I could have spiked the idiot a dozen times," said Ernest, "but what would have been the good? And he has spilled the ink over my papers. If I had seen that before, he should have had something in his arm that would have prevented his snapping his scissors for a month to come. He has been in luck, the insolent haircutter! I have not seen anything so laughable for many a long day. Peace to your *manes*, M. Roland, for rendering me so capable of defending my innocent life against frantic barbers!"

CHAPTER XXV.

It will easily be supposed by those who have ever had their hearts determinately set upon the attainment of an object, that although it did not enter into the calculation of Mrs. Urquhart that Arthur Lygon would be on his way to Paris without waiting for the morning, he was hastening thither in a few moments from leaving her house. He was, in fact, walking towards the capital at his best speed. The journey is not much to a man in health and with average powers, but to Lygon, under the circumstances, it seemed the merest trifle compared with the delay of a few hours. He walked well, and, though by his exertion of strong will he excluded to the utmost of his ability the thoughts which incessantly pressed upon him, as Abraham drove away the birds that sought to come down to the sacrifice, his sensations, alternating between an agitating hopefulness and a bitter and reproachful distrust, made him regardless both of distance and of the minor incidents of the night.

He reached Paris, just as the beautiful city was lying in the earliest light of the summer morning, but he had no eye for the charming spectacle that rewards the stranger who will at such an hour be astir in the French capital. He made direct for the

quarter in which stood the residence of the lady whose card had been given him. The address had been fixed in his mind by a glance, but on taking out the card to be certain as to the number of the house, he perceived that other cards must have lain at angles across it for many a day, as its enamel was partially soiled with dust. But he did not at the moment attach any significance to this little sign, and pushed on for the street designated. It was in the Luxembourg quarter, which he speedily reached. He found the street, he found the house, he found the number, but the last was upon a wall already devoted to the architect, whose destroying workmen (not yet come to that day's duty) had almost removed the house to which Lygon had been sent.

He had been deceived again.

Almost against hope he made such inquiries as were possible. At first, at that hour, there was no one whom he could consult; but, as the morning wore on, and houses opened, Lygon had the opportunity of ascertaining from respectable evidence that Madame * * * * * had certainly resided at the mansion in question, and was well known, but that, at least six months back, she had sold the place to a celebrated banker, who, as Monsieur could see, was going to rebuild it on a scale of—O, such magnificence! As for Madame, she had gone to Italy.

He said nothing, now, that could have told a stranger that Lygon was wounded, grieved, or

angered. The time for such words had passed. He made no sign that could attract the notice of a passer-by. Casually addressed by a workman who asked him for a light, he took out a fusée-box and helped the man to kindle his pipe. A child, toddling after its hurrying mother, fell and bewailed itself, and Arthur Lygon raised it from the ground, and brought it to the woman's hand. He actually stood still and permitted his eye to range over the architecture of one of the churches, though utterly unaware of what he was doing.

At length, exhausted both in body and mind, he entered the first decent place of refreshment and partook of food. He felt that he hated it, and all else that reminded him of home and comfort; but he forced himself to eat.

Then he went out and walked in the now busy city, sparkling in the sunshine, and as he saw men of his own rank on their way to their duties, he looked curiously in their faces, and wondered whether any one of them had left a wife who had embraced him tenderly, and would, in a few hours, have abandoned his house.

Lygon passed some time—he knew not how long—in the state in which intervals of a stupefied unbelief, of utter rejection of the grim circumstances around us, are broken by fever-fits of intense consciousness and bitter agony. And when these hours of agitation were over, and the brain cleared, and the heart throbbed less violently at the recurrence of the image of Laura, Arthur passed to a worse state

—that in which a man resolves to believe the very worst.

And what words shall tell of that agony? Laugh at the attempt, you who have known such an hour. Laugh, and do not desire to be saddened by the picture, feeble as it would be, you who have never loved, or have loved and never known yourselves to have been deceived.

A tremendous hand on his shoulder, and the heartiest of voices in his ear, as he crossed for the fiftieth time, it might have been, the bridge near the Place de la Concorde.

"Arthur Lygon in Paris! That's as things should be."

He turned to be cordially greeted by Robert Urquhart.

The great, tall, broad Scotsman was delighted, and gave out of his big chest one of those laughs which are rarely heard, and so are the more worth hearing. And Parisians looked up at the sound, which indeed was rather over the heads of most of them, and wondered what was pleasing the genial giant with those insufferably ill-made clothes and vast round hat, and why his blue eyes and white teeth should shine out like that at the sight of the much better dressed and more elegant person whose hand he was clearly trying to wring off. And then they went on their way.

If there was one man on earth whom Arthur would have avoided at that moment, it was the man

who was welcoming him so cordially. Without time to consider what course to adopt, without a shadow of preparation for inevitable questions, the answers to which might determine the events of a life, here he was in the irresistible grasp of his friend, the husband of the woman whose history Lygon had so lately learned, of the woman who had enabled Laura to escape from a husband vulgarly deceived by her shameless sister.

But, unless the bridge could have suddenly given way, speaking became a necessity, and Lygon struggled to answer Urquhart, and make inquiries as to the railway accident about which the latter was supposed to be away from Paris.

"O, ay, yon fools? It served them just right, and I wish that a mile had gone down instead of a hundred yards. I was as pleased as Punch, and I just told them so to their faces, before I set the fellows at work. But now then, Arthur, where are you, and how long have you been in this decent city, and is Laura with you—but of course I needn't ask that of the model husband?"

"No, Laura is not with me," said Arthur, hastening to deal with this merciless catechism, and almost wishing that the kind good fellow before him would go mad and spring into the river, or be somehow got out of the way before another word could be said.

"No? That's shabby, and I don't envy you the scolding you'll get from Bertha. But perhaps you have seen her, and had your chastising?"

"Yes, I have been to your house—indeed, I left it only last night. I am on my way to England directly."

"Not exactly, my man, seeing that the way to England is out there," laughed Robert Urquhart, stretching forth his great arm, and pointing in the given direction. "But that's purely a low and topographical view of the case. In the moral and social aspect of the question, I am likewise d—d if you are going to England, because we are going to have a long walk and a long crack, and a trifle of creature comfort, and then we're going to order a jolly dinner at the Traw Frare, of which we will partake in the evening, with befitting thanks to Providence before and after meat. Do you see that, my man?"

"Utterly impossible, my dear Robert. I must get away."

"You'll just do nothing of the kind, so it's no use being an obstinate brute. I hate obstinacy."

"It is matter of business of extreme importance."

"Matter of bosh. Hearken unto me. You can't get to England until night, when it's too late to be doing any business which decorous Christian men like you, and another who shall be nameless, are likely to undertake, and therefore you may as well leave by the night train, and be at your business early in the morning. Now that is so clear that I'll not hear another word on it; and now we'll go and get some lunch, for I will not insult the good breakfast I had three hours ago by pretending I want another. Come along."

At another time no one would have extricated himself more pleasantly and yet more satisfactorily from an engagement he wished to get rid of than Arthur Lygon. But at this moment he seemed powerless. The commonplace excuses of life did not seem to come to his tongue, and his imagination was far too much exhausted to supply him with any better plea. His condition may be judged when it is added that he actually had an impulse to make a sudden start, and flee away from his unconscious tormentor, who would assuredly have been after him with the speed of an Achilles.

"I am not very well," said Arthur, "and I had rather not walk."

"Then we'll ride, which is more dignified and also more retired," said Urquhart. "But I don't like to hear you talk of being ill. I thought that, like myself, you left such follies to the women, who are the final cause of those abominable doctors. What's the matter, my man?"

"Oh, I don't know. I have been working too hard."

"That's a wicked thing to do, and clean contrary to the will of Providence. I am ashamed of you, and likewise of Laura for permitting it. Indeed I believe it must just be her fault, for a more obedient husband, excepting myself, I do not know, and it is her prerogative and privilege to take care of you. Give her a lecture for me."

"Yes, over-work won't do."

"I should think not. But let us go over to

yon caffy, and see what the beggars can give us."

The repast occupied some time, during which Arthur Lygon contrived to parry many home questions, and, by his manner, to impress Urquhart with an idea that Lygon was really much more ill than he owned himself to be. The good-natured talk of the engineer incessantly wounded Arthur to the heart's core; but Robert Urquhart not only could not perceive this, but with the affectionate instinct of a kindly Scot, who always finds happiness in speaking of those dear to him, thought that he was rendering Lygon the very best service in attempting to cheer him up by incessant questions about Laura, and her looks, and habits, and remembrances of some of her old bits of playfulness, or naïveté, and other trifles, the like of which, when addressed to the happy, make them happier. But what were they to the unfortunate husband? Then Robert would speak of the children in succession, and know how old each was, and what he or she could do, and whether they resembled Arthur or Laura, and what were their views for the future; and by the time the lunch was over, Lygon was worked to a state which even Adair might have pitied.

Urquhart watched Arthur swallow at a draught a large quantity of a not very weak wine, and the Scotchman shook his head, and said no more until they were seated in an open carriage, whose driver was ordered to take them a long round, and not to fatigue his horse.

"Parley voo Anglay?" was Mr. Urquhart's demand of the driver. The latter proudly disclaimed the slightest knowledge of the insular tongue.

"So much the better," said Mr. Urquhart, lighting a cigar about the size of a small umbrella, and tendering a similar club of tobacco to Lygon, who took it rather eagerly. It was a good excuse for much silence, that mighty weed. Again the keen Scotchman watched him, as they drove away towards the Arch of Triumph.

After some minutes, Robert Urquhart, who was as straightforward in his dealings as man should be, said, laying a great hand on Lygon's,

"Now, my man, there should be no secrets between us."

No secrets between us, thought Lygon.

And what a secret he, if he chose, could tell the man who was thus addressing him!

"No secrets, I tell you, Arthur. We are a couple of honest men, who have married a couple of honest women, and as they are sisters, we should be brothers. Is that true, Mr. Arthur?"

"I hope so," said Arthur.

"Very well, that's confessed. Now, what is your trouble? Because that you *are* in trouble a man that has both his eyes sharpened by liking, which I take to be the best eye-ointment in the world, can see with half of one of them."

"I told you I was ill, my dear Robert."

"You told me, begging your pardon, that which was only true in a sense, as the devil said when the

monkey called him cousin, and I know better. You are a plucky fellow, as well as a clever one, and if anything was the matter you would go to one of those d—d doctors, and be cured, and meantime you would hold up your head and look like a man. Now you are all down in the mouth, you don't eat, you do drink, and instead of smoking that prime weed like a Christian man, you are sucking it to death as if for a wager. There's something on your mind."

"You are determined to have it so," said Arthur, with a faint smile.

"I'm determined to know all about it, my man. And as I know that some men don't like to break the ice, and I do, I shall just take the liberty of breaking it myself. And if I make a good guess, you'll answer truthfully."

"Yes," said Arthur, with his lips. His heart's answer need not be set down.

"Done. And you'll not be offended?"

"What, with *you?*"

"That's the first decent word you've spoken to-day. But I'll have some more out of you before you've done. Now then, how much will see you out of the mess, and ready to snap your fingers at the world, the flesh, and the devil?"

"How much?" repeated Arthur.

"Come, come, walk uprightly, and according to your lights, or you'll be in for something bad. You know what I mean, my man. We've been having a bit of a race with the constable, and being young

and active, we've licked the old fellow, as was natural."

"What—you think that I am in debt. My dear Robert?"

"I know you are, and there's an end of that. I suppose you have come over here to be out of the way, while things are being put right, and that Laura is managing that for you. Very sensible, too, and all I ask is to be allowed to put on some more coal, and get the journey done at a wee bit better pace."

"You have the kindest heart in the world, Robert," said Lygon, touched.

"I've just got nothing of the sort, I am proud to say," said his brother-in-law. "I would be very sorry to be the biggest fool of my acquaintance. But that's not the question. Do you mean to let me have the pleasure of helping you?"

"If I wanted such help, I would come to you before any man I know in the world," said Arthur.

"And you do. For your wife's sake, Arthur, I think that you are bound to avail yourself of any lawful means of putting matters right. It is not well for a young wife to be left without her husband, and it's bad for the bairns to be accustomed to see their father away, let alone the cackle of the fools outside, who are sure to have something to say if you give them a chance. You must take a bit of paper, and write an I.O.U. for the amount you need, and before we get to our dinner—which, please God! we'll make a bit cheerfuller than our lunch—I'll

have got the money for you in English notes. Then we'll talk about paying back, or else your proud English prelatical stomach will have no digestion. Do you see all that, my man?"

To Lygon, this kindly speech, in which his home, his comfort, his honour, his pride were all cared for by the Scot, suggested a refuge from the immediate pressure upon him—a mode in which he could escape from the slow torture to which he was being exposed. It could do no harm to let Urquhart think that he was right, and to return the money, with an explanatory letter, would be an easier course than talking down the impression which Robert had formed. At all events, in Lygon's state of mind it seemed a most desirable loophole.

"I feel all your kindness, Robert."

"And accept my proposals. Of course you do. That is the only course for a man and a Christian."

"I don't feel like either just now."

"No, but you will by and by. Now I tell you what. Turn over in your own mind, while we drive about in this beast of a carriage, which bumps like the very devil, how much will answer our purpose, and mind you leave a margin for something handsome, which you are bound to buy for Laura for not bringing her to Paris. Turn it over, I say, and while you are doing it, I'll get through a bit of calculation of my own, which I can do in my head if I am not talked to, and which is for the benefit of my friends those beggars that let my railway down,

and be hanged to them. So here goes for a think, my man."

And with this last touch of consideration the warm-hearted Robert Urquhart ceased to speak, nor did the brothers-in-law exchange another word until they alighted, hours after, at the Palais Royal.

But when Urquhart, at the table of the Trois Frères, pushed a piece of paper across to Lygon, and said "Write," Arthur felt it impossible to perform that piece of deception. Anything of the kind had always been foreign to his frank nature, and though in the state of wretchedness in which he found himself he might have permitted his friend to insist on deceiving himself, Lygon could not put his hand even to what might have almost been called a pious fraud.

"Robert," he said, "you are the best fellow in the world ——"

"That's not writing," said Urquhart, impatiently.

"Listen to me. I have been thinking very deeply over a great number of things, and have finally made up my mind what to do. The advancing this money would not remove the weight that is on my mind. But I think it possible that your advice might do so."

"Try, my man; that can't harm you."

"I will. But I assure you, Robert, that I am physically incapable of laying my case before you to-night. I must have some rest. Let everything stand over until to-morrow."

"I hate that way of going on, because it's not going on."

"So do I, but it must be so."

"Your hand on one thing. You don't go back to England without giving me your confidence?"

"I promise that."

"Done. Then we'll dine *ad interim*. Garsong. Eecy."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER her visit to her father at Canonbury, Mrs. Hawkesley returned to Maida Hill, anxious to communicate to her husband the scanty information which Mr. Vernon had added to the contents of his letter. Charles Hawkesley had not arrived, and long indeed seemed the delay. Beatrice was all but on the point of hastening over to Brompton, in the idea that some painful disclosure had detained her husband, when he entered with the two boys. In their coming that day, instead of the next, as proposed, she naturally detected fresh cause for alarm; but a word from her husband sufficed to reassure her sufficiently to give Walter and Fred her usual kindly welcome.

"Neither of our parents has chosen to come back yet," said Hawkesley, "so we have deserted the house, and come over to live with our cruel uncle and aunt, and when we are wanted, we are to be sent for."

But when the boys had been cared for by Aunt Beatrice, and had been sent into the garden with letter of licence to deal at will with the fruit, a concession not lightly made at other times, and Hawkesley and his wife were alone, his first words were—

"Something wrong, dearest."

"I knew it," said Beatrice, hastily. "I had a presentiment that it was so, and though you laugh at such things, I felt that when we met again we should have bad news. Tell me quickly—you know I want no preparation."

"Nay, there is *no* news. That is, in fact, the worst I have to tell, except some small matters, which may in themselves be nothing."

And the husband and wife told each other the results of their respective errands.

"And what do *you* make of it, dearest?" said Beatrice, after a long pause.

"I would rather hear your idea—you are her sister."

"Charles," said his wife, "that means that you suspect something very painful, and would not wound me by being the first to impute such a thing."

"Dearest girl, what *is* one to think, when a wife suddenly leaves her home with an unknown gentleman, and the husband, without a word to any friend, takes away his daughter, and is heard of no more?"

"You know how fond he is of Clara. I do not see anything in his taking her rather than either of the boys."

"Well, pass that for the moment. What is your key to the mystery?"

"I cannot arrange my thoughts in the least. I am simply at a loss to comprehend the affair. But, Charles, it is not an inexplicable story that shall make me think ill of darling Laura."

"Nor me, and you do not want to be told my

affection for Laura. We were joking over it only the other morning."

"So we were, and little thinking——Charles, I am perfectly terrified at a thought that flashes upon me. The idea is almost too dreadful. Help me to crush it at once, before it begins to haunt me."

"My dearest wife!"

"Is it—is it possible—but it is not," she said, drawing closely to her husband, and speaking with agitation—"is it conceivable that the strange man whom nobody knew, and who instantly removed Laura from her house, could have been a—a doctor? Say no."

"I understand you," said Hawkesley, turning pale. "But no, no, a thousand times no, my own one."

"The idea came like lightning as you spoke this moment, and impressions which come like that are often true——"

"Banish it—dispel it—there is not the shadow of reason in it. My dear Beatrice, you have known Laura from babyhood, and can say for yourself whether there was ever the faintest defect in her beautifully ordered mind."

"But is it not the most delicate minds that are most easily injured?"

"Assuredly not. That is one of the mistakes of ignorance—don't be angry with the word, dearest; I use the strongest purposely. It is the machine in which there are flaws and damages that flies, the perfect one is true and safe to the last. Pray

drive away the thought — reject it as absolutely as I do."

"You do, entirely?"

"Utterly."

"Then I will. And yet how the story would agree with such a misery. Laura is taken away in her husband's absence: he could not bear to see her removed: a single stranger, in black——"

"Never heed the black. Unless you can suppose that she had been previously seen by two medical men, who must have been together in judgment in her case, the thing is impossible. It *is* impossible. In Heaven's name, my dearest wife, do not let us pursue that terrible course of thought."

"Then," persisted Beatrice, "he cannot bear to be in the deserted house, and flies away with Clara, who reminds him of her mother——"

"Would a man who loved his wife take her image with him?"

"Yes, Charles, I think he would if she had been removed from him by death or misfortune—not if she had been wrong, perhaps. But who dares accuse Laura of that?"

"I would not hear it, but——"

"No, Charles, no. If there is truth and goodness and purity in woman, it is in my sister Laura. The other thought is dreadful, but not so dreadful as the idea that ——; but that you will never believe," she said, clasping both her husband's hands.

"It would be almost the saddest hour I could live,

if an hour should come to make me think ill of her, Beatrice. But do not let this abominable haze of anonymous letters and shopmen's slanders blind us to other ways of accounting for the affair."

"O, do you see any other ways? Anything to drive away the fearful thought of her possible insanity."

"I beg you, darling, to reject that, whether we see at once any other solution or do not. There is one idea comes to me already; it seems a wild one, but the incidents of real life are so much wilder than anything one dares invent—— "

"Yes, yes."

"This man in black—by the way, who told us he was in black—are we beginning with a mistake?"

"You said it was Freddy."

"Yes, but does a boy notice dress?"

"He said it before Walter."

"Who had not seen him, I think," said Hawkesley. "I must ascertain as casually as I can."

He went out to speak to the boys, and returned in a few minutes.

"Freddy speaks positively to the black dress, and he had a good look at the stranger, who it seems interposed between the children and a visit to the Zoological Gardens. We may take the black for granted. Beatrice, dear, had Laura ever any Catholic leanings?"

"No," said Mrs. Hawkesley, promptly, "certainly not, that I ever heard of. Poor Bertha used to be rather inclined to go to Catholic chapels, not from

any particular convictions, for she had not many of them, but the music, and the incense, and novels about mysterious Jesuits, worked upon her at one time. But not Laura. What is your idea?"

"I hardly know, but stay a moment. Do you mean that Bertha at any time became a Catholic, or had any connection with the Catholics beyond attending their services?"

"I don't think so. To tell you the truth, she did not get much mercy from me when she spoke of such things, for I knew that religion had nothing to do with her likings, and that they were the merest sentimentality."

"Laura would be more tolerant?"

"Why, Laura was the youngest, and would scarcely dare to speak to Bertha as I did, and they were more confidential with one another than with me, though now that Laura is a woman, I know that she has learned to love me the best."

"Laura was her confidant."

"At one time very much so. Partly it was my fault — perhaps I made too few allowances for Bertha's nature, and partly, dear, it was your own, for I was thinking a great deal more about your letters, and your making your way upwards in life, to care for the girls' chatter about the heroes of novels, and the divinely handsome men they had seen riding through the village."

"Come, I am leading you into cheerfulness, dear, and now be prepared to laugh at what I am going to ask."

"*Will* I laugh if it is anything that shows me daylight?"

"It seems to me possible that Bertha, in some of those sentimental moods, as you very properly call them, may have got entangled in some of the meshes which are constantly spread for the young, by Catholic missionaries, some of whom, I dare say, believe that they are doing good work, and that she may have drawn in Laura with her. What particular form of entanglement it may have been I don't just now try to guess, but such things are."

"Those Jesuits, perhaps, who are so clever."

"Well, they tell us that they are. I have met a good many, and thought them much too clever to do harm, seeing that 'Beware of Mantraps' was as plainly to be read in the down look, in the impertinent curiosity, and in the unfrank conversation, as ever one read it in the preserves of the squirearchy. But they manage to lay hold on the minds of the young, I fancy, and especially of girls of a mopish turn, and it is only when the young lady gets married that she recognises the absolute fitness of the Jesuit's being kicked down stairs. Before that time he may have wound his way into some of her secrets, and may afterwards use them in his own fashion. Were there any Jesuits at Lipthwaite?—if so, they have not done *you* much harm."

"Well, there was a dear old Catholic priest who was never out of the houses of the poor, and who died at last of typhus caught by a sick bed."

"Ah! but he was a gentleman as well as a priest. I remember his white hands and courtly manner, though I saw him but once. But you had no real Jesuit at Lipthwaite."

"No. There was a writing-master at Mrs. Spagley's, a man whom I detested, though he was a clever man, too, and some of us elder girls had a notion that he was a Jesuit, but I suppose, now, that it was all nonsense, and that we thought him one only because he dressed in black, and made silky kinds of answers to questions, never telling you what you wanted to know."

"That is a little in their line, too. Did Bertha know him?"

"Yes, I tell you, he was our writing-master."

"What was his name?"

"Hardwick—Mr. Ernest Hardwick—I remember it well by a girl's joke that he was never in earnest."

"He dressed in black," repeated Charles Hawkesley, "but, pooh, that is nothing — a good many thousands of honest men do that—but I feel it is nonsense, and yet, while one is holding an imaginary thread, tell me — was he intimate with you beyond the relations of teacher and pupil?"

"He used to call sometimes at the Hut, but papa's talk was too much in earnest for him, and he had a scoffing kind of manner with men, which papa did not like, so there was not much intimacy. But, my dearest Charles, how on earth can you connect a country writing-master with Laura's disappearance?"

"Perhaps not at all, and yet I have an odd persistence in following up a trace of a story. Beatrice, what was Laura's reason, when she sat for that portrait, for being painted with a rosary?"

"Is she? To be sure she is, I have seen it a thousand times. It never occurred to me to think why. I supposed that it was a fancy of the painter."

"Very likely it was. I dare say that it was. But suppose that it was not, and that something was symbolised."

"Do you mean to say that you think Laura is a concealed Catholic, and that some one has come to claim her and take her away to a convent? Good Heavens, Charles, can such things be done?"

"My dearest, you hasten to fill up a very imperfect outline of mine, and not exactly in the way I intended. We have not the least real basis upon which to build our conjectures, but having nothing to do but conjecture—except one thing, which I will tell you presently — a sort of idea, hardly worth calling one, presents itself. My dear Beatrice, Laura is too good to be suspected of wrong. Laura is too wise to be suspected of aberration, but it is on the cards that Bertha—"

"Bertha!"

"Stop. That Bertha, who does not love her husband," said Hawkesley, speaking slowly and distinctly, as if he wished her to scan every idea as he presented it,—"that Bertha, who, at all events, appears not to love her husband, which, the husband considered, is a very singular fact—should have united

herself, in other days, to the Catholic church, and should have induced Laura to do the same?"

"Impossible."

"I may think so too, but hear me out. Bertha has long been residing in a Catholic country, and old feelings may have revived, to say nothing of the system of proselytism, which is always on the look out for its prey, and which would not be long in discovering an impressionable woman who had once believed."

"When you put such an idea into words it seems reasonable," said Beatrice, "but I feel it is the vaguest guessing."

"So it is, and let us guess on. Bertha has been re-converted, and I need not tell you that the first result of such a process would be to alienate her from her heretic husband, and to withdraw her confidences from him. Hence, we may get at that estrangement which we were deploring the other morning, and acquit Bertha of the horrible stupidity of not appreciating such a man as Robert Urquhart."

"But you charge her with folly, and with deceit, which is worse than anything in the world."

"Let us suppose that her butterfly mind, such as it is, has risen above dress and the opera, and settled on a sort of perfumed religion, which tells her, through the mouth of her confessor, that the deceit is pardonable, or even laudable, if truth-speaking would render her less useful to the Church."

"Butterfly, indeed. That would be far too mild a name for her."

"Nay, nay, she is not wise. You know that. But, then, for Laura."

"She is no butterfly, dear."

"No, indeed. But Laura has been a very young girl, who was left very much to herself, without a mother's guidance, and who made this silly Bertha her friend and confidant."

"If I saw things as you suggest them, how I ought to reproach myself, Charles, for not having been more of a mother to her, poor child."

"And who had been a mother to you, dearest, and where should you have learned the value of such counsel? Besides, you must share the guilt, if there is any, with me, who deprived your sister of your companionship."

"You always try to make me believe I am right, Charles."

"When I find you wrong, I will tell you so—rely on me," said Hawkesley, pressing her hand. "But just let me finish my chapter of possibilities. Bertha, now entirely in the hands of her priest, has been worked upon to send him, or one of his brethren, over here, and has prevailed on Laura, by what arguments we have yet to learn, to visit her sister in a haste which has, of course, to be accounted for, but which is quite reconcileable with the exacting demands of the Church—when you are in its power."

"You make out a story before my eyes," said

Beatrice, "and I hardly know whether to wish to believe it or not."

"Do neither, until we know more."

"What was the other thing you said we had to do?"

"To ascertain for ourselves whether Laura has gone to her sister."

"Do you mean by writing?"

"I am afraid to write."

"Ah! then you do not believe a word of your own story."

"Why do you say so?"

"Because, Charles, if she should *not* be there, and your letter should miscarry—that is what you are thinking of. You are suspecting something far worse than even the folly you think may have been committed."

"You shall have all my thoughts. I should be inclined, Beatrice, to accept this wild theory of mine, while we waited for news, but for one consideration."

"Laura's strong sense?"

"Laura's strong love."

"Yes, there would be the chain to bind her to her home."

"Why, Beatrice, do you think that if a score of sisters were to summon *you*, through the mouths of a whole college of Jesuits, to leave my house in my absence, they would have power to move you from this hearthstone."

"Not all the sisters and priests in the world."

"Not if, when a girl, you had taken all the vows of the Church?"

"I know one vow only, Charles."

"I know it, wife. And I thought that Laura had no other."

"Say, for my sake, that you think so still. Let us believe anything, no matter how improbable—that the story of the lady who was dying, and which that servant dared to tell Walter not to believe—if I were Price, I would have turned her into the street in five minutes—"

"Price had no authority."

"Don't tell me—I would have given her to the police. I daresay that she will turn out to have been a thief."

"Your anger against her is just, but do not blame Price, who had really no more right to put Eliza into the street than I have."

"No, dear, no. But it puts one in a rage to think that she should dare tell a child not to believe his own father, when he is speaking about the child's own mother. I wonder Walter did not strike her."

"He can strike at the proper time, as I ought to tell you." And Hawkesley told of Walter's vengeance on the calumniator.

"A darling, noble boy!" exclaimed his aunt. "That was the Vernon blood."

"Possibly," said Hawkesley, smiling. "And there is some of that article on his hand, and perhaps you may as well see to it."

"Is he hurt? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Were we not speaking on a graver subject till this moment?"

"Yes, yes," said Beatrice, "but you made the tears come into my eyes by telling me of his courage in the cause of his mother. Let us, who know her even better than the poor child does, Charles dear, let us be as courageous, and utterly refuse to listen to the least thing against her. Believe me, we shall be right."

"I am only too rejoiced to see you take that view," said Hawkesley.

"Did you expect me to condemn her because I do not know where she is, and because some wretches spread scandals against her? Do you think that Laura would judge me so, Charles?"

"I love you for standing by her. And as we are thoroughly agreed about this, you can bear to hear, and to recollect, that appearances are most fatally against her."

"Indeed they are. But all will be explained, and we shall have the happiness of telling her, on this very hearthstone you spoke of, that we knew from the first all would be well."

"Is that one of your presentiments?"

He asked it quietly enough, and Beatrice's lips were parting, in the act of reply, when she turned pale, and looked round at him with eyes that suddenly brimmed with tears.

"I dare not say yes," she whispered, and broke into a convulsive fit of crying.

"Come, come," said her husband, "you must be

calm, dear, and remember how many things good and bad have happened to us without any presentiments. Perhaps they do not come when they are asked for."

"I was just going to say yes," sobbed his wife, "for I was taking the wish for the thing, when I felt that I was going to utter a falsehood. I only pray that all may be well."

"God grant it. But on one thing I am resolved. I will test that story which has framed itself to me out of a parcel of trifles which one is ashamed to call facts."

"I felt that you were saying it all to draw me away from darker views, and I took it as kindness, though I could not believe in it," said Beatrice, on her husband's bosom.

"But as I spoke it grew upon me," said he; "and I will send through Aventayle, who has agents in Paris. Meantime, dear, try and make those children as happy as you can. It is a comfort that they love you as if you were their mother."

"I understand you, Charles," said Beatrice, "but darling, *do* not talk so—at least now."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Of course," said Mr. Aventayle, "always show him up. Stay, clear a seat of some kind for him, can't you?"

The inquiry did not seem altogether beside the mark. For though the manager's room at the theatre was a tolerably large one, it was so completely choked up with his Varieties, as he called them, that any disarrangement of that chaos threatened a general confluence of matter. It would be almost easier to say what was not in the room than what was, or at all events the latter feat could only be accomplished by the pen of an untiring inventory-maker, who should not be deterred from his work by any surprises, or for a moment drawn into the feeble belief that classification was a possibility. Upon the dusty crimson cushion of a white and elegantly gilded chair, in which some theatrical nobleman of the Regency date had sat, and uttered exceedingly improper sentiments during the progress of a melodrama, reposed a handsome Skye terrier, and it naturally seemed *his* place to move in favour of a visitor. But Mop was of an opposite opinion, and signified it by so resolute a growl when the manager's servant touched the chair, that he abandoned the idea, and looked hopelessly round

for some other quarter in which Mr. Hawkesley might be planted. But chaos was obdurate. To remove from an old couch near the fire-place a vast heap of manuscripts and newspapers, was more than Beeton's place was worth, Mr. Aventayle always declaring that he had placed everything there in exact order, and knew where to lay his hand upon it. Any of the big wooden boxes, some piled on others, would have made a good seat, but then on one was a great chandelier, and another held a pyramid of books that Aventayle had bought, as curiosities, at a sale, and would never have time to look into while he had eyes to read them. A model of his stage, with the scenery, in miniature, of a celebrated "effect," was mounted on another box, and Vister, the wonderful painter, had, in reply to the objurgations of his manager, taken a solemn oath, every evening for some months, to remove it the next morning, but meantime it was there. A window seat seemed more promising, but to utilise that for social purposes involved the moving a lamp which stood in a little pool of oil, about eight hats of various shapes and ages, and a plaster caricature statue of M. Alexandre Dumas, the regenerator of Italy. So, with a helpless look that comprised his employer's whole room, the portraits of the ladies and gentlemen of the company in characters in which they had been painted, the suspended list of pieces, with the number of nights each had run, the manager's table, loaded with letters that overflowed the small island he sought to

keep for his writing-place, the water-bottle and tumbler flanking the splendid French clock that was never right, but now and then, by frantically striking nineteen, claimed the privilege of genius to do as it pleased, and the grand array of bandboxes, music-books, swords, boots, and images, with which it pleased Mr. Aventayle to surround himself, Beeton withdrew to bring up Mr. Hawkesley.

He did not leave the manager solitary, for by his side stood a fiend. That is to say, one of the most accomplished members of the company, dressed for some Mephistophilean part, but with rather more diabolic adjuncts than are usually given to the friend of Faust, was in counsel with his manager, and in the dim light of the shaded lamp, looked, as he stood by the huge black chair of his chief, as if he were tempting the latter to sign some unhallowed compact. The thought, however, would not have occurred to any person likely to enter that room; a few years of practical stage life wear out any fancies arising from theatrical accidents, and it is perhaps difficult to bore an actor more completely than by what you deem facetiousness, based on topics from his own profession.

"You know Hawkesley, Grayling, don't you?"

"Yes, to be sure. A capital fellow, and a decidedly clever one. Has he got anything for us?"

"I hope so."

Mr. Aventayle, still a handsome man, though considerably past middle life, and retaining the play

of features—fine ones—which had in earlier days materially aided him to eminence, placed his double-glass to his eyes, as he heard Hawkesley's step, and when the latter entered affected to survey him with intense curiosity. Then, without speaking, he dropped the glasses, as if hopelessly.

"No! I do not see three acts in *that* face. Do you, Grayling?" he asked of the fiend.

"Well, I am not much of a physiognomist, but I think I see two, and perhaps a prologue," said the actor, shaking hands with Hawkesley.

"Ah, you were always of a cheerful nature. Mop, you old fool, will you come down?" said the manager, spilling out the reluctant animal to the ground, and inducting Hawkesley into the nobleman's seat. "I am very glad to see you, on any terms," he continued, "as it shows that you have a hankering after the place. What will you have to drink?"

"What have you got that is good on a warm night?"

"Everything in the world; everything without exception. But if you will take my advice you will try our highly superior cold brandy-and-water at nothing per glass, waiters included."

"I understand. As thou sayest, so let it be."

And the manager, the devil, and the author were soon provided with their beverage.

"Now of course you won't talk before me," said the fiend, "so I shall finish this, and go."

"Unless Hawkesley has any secrets, I have none,"

said Aventayle, "and you should always try, Grayling, to remain in the society of the good and virtuous, because you may improve yourself by their conversation and example: and you should also, Grayling, pass the brandy when you have helped yourself."

"I have been dining at the club," said Hawkesley, "and thought I would walk round and tell you that I have read that piece you gave me."

"Ah! well?"

"In its present form, it is out of the question."

"Rough and crude. I told you so."

"The story won't do. They wouldn't stand it."

"They'll stand a good deal, too."

"Yes, but this is too cynically offensive to be endured. They will sit and cry over a Traviata who whines because her lungs are going, but they would hiss her if she were in health, and prosperous and defiant, like one of the women in this thing. It won't do, Aventayle."

"If you say so on consideration, there is an end of the matter; but the play seemed to me to have some very strong stuff in it."

"Strong as hartshorn," said Hawkesley. "But it will not do for you. I wish it would."

"Which means that you don't want to work."

"No, it does not, my dear fellow. I have a good notion for you. But I would rather not have taken it up until after Christmas; and if you could bring out this thing, I should have been glad of the interval. But I shall be ready for you soon."

"That's well. Anything for this boy?" said the manager, indicating the fiend.

"Plenty."

"That's well again, and we'll ask you no more questions."

"I want to ask you one or two. You said you knew nothing of the man who sends you this piece, except that his name is Adair."

"Nothing," said Aventayle, "but he writes me a long letter, after the manner and fashion of young dramatists, explaining his play at great length, as if it was not strong enough to explain itself."

"Would you mind showing me his letter?"

"Not a bit," said Aventayle. "But I should very much mind looking for it." And he pointed, with a piteous look, at the mass of correspondence before him.

"But I should particularly like to see it."

"H'm. In that case you shall, but it is a cruel thing to ask me to go through all that heap."

"Why don't you keep your papers in order?"

"Manage a theatre for a fortnight, and you'll see, my boy," said Mr. Aventayle, beginning a search among his letters.

"I will come and sort them and docket them for you."

"You'll go and mind your own business, which is the finishing my piece. Have you got a good title?"

"Yes, excellent."

"Then the piece will be good. I have noticed

that if a man fumbles over a title, he has generally written without purpose. Confound the letter!" the manager growled, or may have said worse.

"I couldn't sit in such a room as this," said Mr. Grayling.

"Who said you could? You are not sitting. Nobody asked you to sit," grumbled Aventayle, with pretended petulance, as he turned over his heaps, and was reminded at every turn of something he had neglected to attend to, or somebody who ought to have been obliged or abused. At the recurrence of each of these suggestions the manager fired off a fresh growl.

"I'm afraid I am bringing your sins to your mind," said Hawkesley. "Your good health."

"People have no right to write letters, I'll be hanged if they have," said Aventayle. "Here it is —no it isn't—that's from a woman I never saw, giving me five sides of note-paper to prove why I ought to give her a box, and she's as rich as creases, as old Poulter used to say; her husband's a banker."

"Send her the box, if she will bring him," said Grayling. "I'm told bankers' morals are queer, and the piece may do him good."

"Let him pay for improvements," said the manager. "I know I have to do so. I can't see the letter."

"Shall I look?" said Grayling, "or are you afraid of my seeing letters poisoning your mind against me."

"I had rather you did, it might make you more careful and painstaking," said Aventayle. "Do look, there's a dear boy, while I refresh myself. A large sheet, a very neat hand, and the signature something Adair."

And he turned away with a sigh, and nodded across his tumbler at Hawkesley.

"What do you want to see the letter for?" he said. "Childish curiosity?"

"No, but for a reason."

"We must keep him in good humour just now," said Aventayle, in a stage whisper, behind his hand, to Grayling. "Find it for him."

"I am proceeding systematically," said the actor. "Mind your brandy-and-water."

The manager and the author chatted on for some minutes, and the actor went on with his search. Hawkesley, in answer to a renewed demand by his friend, assured him that the new play was really in hand, and that he liked it as it came on, whereat Aventayle professed himself consoled for his life and other misfortunes, and begged that the ladies' characters might be made as strong as possible. This again Hawkesley promised, and was enlarging upon the extreme importance of keeping the women constantly upon the stage, when the fiend uttered a melodramatic

"Ha!"

"Got it?" asked Aventayle.

Without a word, the fiend strode to Hawkesley, and laid the letter in his hand. It was long, and as

the author began, with some eagerness, to read it, Aventayle said,

"Bother reading, and spoiling talk. Put it into your pocket."

Many a day afterwards, Hawkesley recalled the circumstances to his mind, and remembered that the letter had been put into his hand by the devil.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Do not spur a willing horse," is a rule of masculine invention, and one which only the higher minds among the gentler sex are very apt to adopt and obey. It was scarcely to be expected that Mary Henderson, with her soul on fire for the attainment of a revenge of her own, should have sufficient self-command to follow the wise counsel of the saw. Chiefly in order to ensure the unhesitating obedience of her lover, but a little, it may be, with a view of atoning to herself for having somewhat compromised her hitherto unbending dignity by her display of interest and affection at the moment of alarm, Henderson, when alone with M. Silvain, hesitated not to let him perceive her comprehension of his signal defeat at the hand of Adair. Assured of Silvain's safety, she relapsed into her ordinary cold manner, and infused some slight touch of the most irritating compassion for the man who had sought to avenge a woman's wrongs without being able to do so effectively. She alluded to Adair as one who was so evidently Silvain's superior, both in intellect and physical prowess, that the latter must avoid annoying him for the future, and must leave Mary (or Matilde, as she would still be to Silvain) to protect herself in the best way a helpless girl might.

All this was utterly needless, and the horse wanted no spur. The stream of insults he had received from Ernest, and the complete overthrow which the Frenchman had sustained, in the presence of his mistress, were quite enough to saturate his very being with the deadliest hatred of the scornful conqueror. There was something approaching to dignity in the silence with which he listened to Henderson's galling talk, and in the almost mournful smile with which he repaid her. His compressed lip and dangerous eye might have given her full assurance that his vindictiveness was not to be increased by anything she could urge, and when Mary had uttered as many demi-sarcasms as occurred to her uncomfortable spirit, Silvain quietly took her hand, pressed it with affection, and intimated that she had said enough, unless she had any distinct course to propose, in which case it was his duty to postpone any plan he might have formed.

"You will do nothing whatever without asking my leave," said Mary. "It is not for you to presume to take other people's affairs into your hands."

M. Silvain must be the guardian of his own honour, but was ready to obey to the letter any order of Mademoiselle.

"I have no order to give at present, but we never speak again if you see that man any more without my permission."

M. Silvain signified his assent by a grave bow, and another touch of Mademoiselle's hand.

"Don't bow at me," said she, impatiently. "Swear it."

"My word is as binding as an oath, Mademoiselle. Is it an English custom to require oaths from those we trust?"

"I do not know that I trust you," said Henderson. "Well, yes, I do," she added, observing his reproachful look, "but it is a satisfaction to have a solemn promise."

"In homage to an English feeling, then, Mademoiselle, I swear to what you demand, but my heart, already your slave, needs no new sacrament."

"Don't talk in that profane manner," said Mary, totally ignorant of her lover's meaning. "But you have sworn, and that is enough. Now, I suppose you'll go back to your shop?"

"For the moment, yes, unless Mademoiselle has commands."

"Stay there until I come, or send to you."

"I am at your orders, Mademoiselle."

She gave him her hand, kindly enough, as they parted, and his look of intense gratitude and admiration touched her heart.

"After all," she said, on her way to the avenue, "he is a brave and a true fellow; and as for his not fighting so well as that wretch, who, I dare say, has often got his living by teaching the trade, that is nothing. If Silvain had time and money to be always practising, he would be a splendid fencer, and even without his sword, and with his eyes sparkling, he looked much more noble than the white-faced creature opposite to him. Silvain's figure is perfection, and if he only dressed—"

But we need not delay over the affectionate meditations of the *femme-de-chambre.*

At the farther end of the ground-floor of the house of Mr. Urquhart, and opening into the large room of miscellaneous scientific matter which has been described, was a small apartment, nearly empty, and with a ground-glass French window looking upon the garden. This room could be approached by a small narrow staircase, from the first-floor, but this approach was never used, and the door above was constantly locked. It had been Henderson's suggestion that a little furniture should be taken into the room, and that while Mrs. Lygon should be in the house, it should be her place of refuge, one not likely to be thought of, and one which afforded a ready escape to the garden. Scarcely waiting for the assent of either of the ladies, Henderson, with stealthy rapidity, had discovered, oiled, and used the key of the stair, and without the knowledge of the other domestics had conveyed into the apartment enough to render it tenantable.

"The other girls are very ignorant, Madame," said Henderson to Mrs. Urquhart, as the latter descended into the room, "and they believe in ghosts. I shall tell them, by accident, a ghost-story before bed-time, that will make them afraid even to look at the door of the big room as they go out and in."

The sisters were alone in the secluded chamber, when a letter was thrown down the stair by the vigilant Henderson.

It was for Mrs. Urquhart, and was in the bold free hand of her husband.

Bertha trembled too much to open and read it, but Laura did both, and found that it contained a few lines from Robert Urquhart, in which he congratulated himself on having met with Lygon, and scolded Bertha for not having kept him. "As a punishment for such a violation of all the sacred duties of hospitality," the writer went on, "we two gay young dogs intend to disport ourselves in the pleasures of Paris for a while, but if our hearts should relent, or rich Countesses should make very desperate efforts to carry us off, we shall just drop down to Versailles at any hour that may seem good unto us, and it may promote peace and forgiveness should there be an adequate supply of creature-comforts at the shortest notice." Bertha was also ordered to revolve in her mind what would be fittest for a united present for Laura, which her husband should take over in the hope of appeasing her wrath at being abandoned, of which he seemed to be in wonderful terror.

"They have met," gasped Bertha.

"It is always so," said Laura, wiping tears from her eyes, as she again read the playful letter, just one which might have been looked for from either Lygon or Urquhart, had circumstances been as the latter supposed them.

"Arthur has said nothing to him."

"And what could you dream that Arthur would say!" asked Laura, indignantly, a wife's pride flush-

ing her fair brow at the shadow of a suspicion that Lygon would willingly say aught to compromise herself or her sister.

"He left me in a fever of rage," said Bertha. "He spoke quietly enough, but I know that he was in a rage."

"And had he not a right to be? A right! There is nothing that he could do that could not be justified, but Arthur will never do anything to need justification," said Laura, proudly. "O, if I could say the same," she added. "But I will trust that he will trust me yet."

"They may come at any time," said Bertha, feebly.

"Arthur will not return here," replied Mrs. Lygon. "They have met by accident. He could not escape from your husband, but will shake him off at the first moment. Perhaps he is now on his way to London—to his home," she said, burying her face in her hands.

"I hope so," said Bertha, whose nature saw something less of danger in the absence of one of those whom she dreaded.

"Do you?" replied Laura, slowly and reproachfully. "There! I must not think of it, and I must not expect you to be stronger than you are. Robert will come here without Arthur," she added in a calm voice, "and you have nothing to fear from what may pass between them. It is I only who am in danger—comfort yourself with that thought."

"Do not speak so unkindly."

"I did not mean unkindness, dear. I only mean to reassure you. Now, we have no time to lose."

"If one of the servants should say that you have been here," said Bertha, tremulously, "and Robert should know."

"Angelique only has seen and knows me. We must trust to Henderson to silence her. That is a small risk among great ones."

"But if Arthur should have told Robert?"

"My life and soul on Arthur's silence where I am concerned," replied Laura, almost fiercely. "Do not hint at such a thing again, Bertha, or I will leave you to yourself, and go off to England. It is only my intense confidence in Arthur, my deep conviction of his overmastering love for me, that sustains me in this trial. You do not understand me, but understand that you will ruin yourself if you shake the belief that holds me up. Not one more word about that."

"What next are we to do?" said Bertha, humbly.

"We have done little or nothing, and yet I seem to see a way opening. Pardon me, Bertha dear, but it is useless to talk to you. I must see Henderson. It is shocking to be driven to such counsels, but things have gone too far for hesitation, and I must avail myself of every means in my power to help you and save you. Please to send Henderson to me."

"I wish I was dead," said Bertha, slowly departing.

"Would dying save your honour in the eyes of

your husband?" asked Laura, laying a firm hand on her sister's arm.

"I should be out of the way of all fear," sobbed Bertha.

"Send Henderson to me," replied Mrs. Lygon, calmly. And she gazed wistfully at the retreating form of her sister.

"If the saving her were all," she murmured, "would I have incurred this peril? But I will go through with it now, to the very end. O, Arthur! my darling Arthur! My own, my noble, loving one!"

Henderson stood before her, ere the wife's eyes could discern her through the mist that dimmed them.

Mrs. Lygon recovered herself with a strong effort.

"If I might speak, Madame, before you had anything to say to me?"

"Yes, Mary."

"I did not think I should have any news so soon, Madame, but you may wish to hear of something which has happened."

"Quick, tell me."

"It does not concern anybody you know, Madame, except through me. But I told you that I believed I knew a person that I could trust to shed his life for me, if wanted."

"Strong words, Mary."

"They are that, Madame, but not too strong, if I may say so."

And she briefly told the story of the duel at the

inn, and did not fail to lay the utmost stress upon M. Silvain's having become the deadliest and the most resolved enemy that Adair could have.

Mrs. Lygon listened with intense interest. If, when the story was done, she felt a pang of regret that the speaker had not to tell of a different ending to the fray, it need hardly be said that she gave utterance to no such vengeful thought.

"You should be a good girl, Mary, to have inspired such a love in a brave and honourable man."

And Henderson's lips quivered proudly at the double praise.

"I did not think that anybody's words could make me so happy, Madame," said the girl, keeping down tears of pleasure. "You make me bold to ask one favour."

"You will ask nothing improper, Mary, I am sure."

"I would cut off my hand first, Madame. But if you would have the goodness only to see him."

"Him?" said Mrs. Lygon, startled. "You mean——"

"M. Silvain, Madame. Only for one moment. If you would only let him see you. I would not think of your speaking to him, or condescending to talk to him about anything. That is my business, But to see him for a minute, and let him say one word."

"The fewer persons I see the better."

"Not another soul in the world, Madame. I shall take care of all that, and proud to be trusted.

But if you would see poor Silvain for just one minute."

"If you desire it, then, I will."

"Thank you, Madame, for him and for me. There is no one in the house just now, except Madame and yourself—Angelique and Suzanne are gone to mass —and if you would come into the next room, only for a moment as I say. O, not even Silvain knows of *this* place, no soul but me."

Mrs. Lygon ascended the stairs, and, conducted by Henderson, whose vigilance was tiger-like, came down into the chamber of science. Mary, with an apology, departed for a moment, and returned, bringing her lover.

M. Silvain's approach was most respectful, and his bow, without being servile, expressed the deep honour he felt. He either had not intended to speak, or hesitated for words, when Mrs. Lygon, addressing him in his own language, said,

"M. Silvain, this young person has told me that you have been displaying your affection for her by an act of unusual bravery. I know her friends in England, and it will give me happiness to tell them that she has secured the regard of a man of honour."

That speech, delivered in a gracious voice, and moreover in French, by a beautiful woman, vanquished M. Silvain at once, and literally brought him to the ground. For, remembering what his mistress had said upon the subject of oaths, it flashed upon him that such a homage would be but a worthy

reply to so much kindness. Dropping on one knee, and holding his arm aloft, M. Silvain called upon his Maker to listen to and attest the lover's vow to perform, with the utmost fidelity of his soul, whatever wish Madame might honour him by signifying through Mademoiselle.

Greatly scandalized, Mary made all speed to remove her demonstrative admirer from the chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE kind-hearted Scotsman had no idea of losing sight of Lygon, and they took up their quarters for the night at the same hotel. Arthur retired early, though not to sleep; and Urquhart, who had disposed of a few hours in the smoking pavilion in the rear of the house, by getting through about a couple of feet of tobacco, in company with a pleasant circle of English and Americans, who loved to congregate in that apartment and exchange experiences of travel, proceeded to bed about the time that his friend, outwearied with mental and physical fatigue, fell into a disturbed and feverish slumber. At an early hour in the morning they met again, Lygon pale and nervous, Urquhart cheery and vigorous, but with a dire grievance, at which he grumbled mightily, in being deprived of a huge shower bath, wherewith when at home he recruited his mighty limbs for the work of the day.

"These French never will be civilised Christians," he said, "until they get the high service all over Paris, and they'll not have that for many a day, for there is a whole army of rascally water-carriers who would get up a revolution if their monopoly were threatened. But perhaps our friend Looey" (it was so that he affectionately described the Elected of

the Millions) "will have the pluck to cart them all off to Cayenne one of these days, and let his subjects wash themselves. It is as much a state necessity as was the massacre of the Janizaries out in Constantinople."

Arthur Lygon did not seem much interested in the sanitary condition of the French metropolis, and Urquhart went on:

"You look as if you would be none the worse for a header into Loch Katrine, the which lake we have turned into every dressing-room in Glasgow, my man. You've nothing like that in London, which proves where the superior nation is to be found."

Lygon smiled faintly, but was in no mood to give the good-natured battle with which in other days he had often met the Scot's assertions in favour of his country.

"Well," said Urquhart, "we'll not be proud and vaunt over you too much, because that's not the right thing, and if you'll take off that cup of coffee, we'll e'en go and sit on one of the benches in yon garden, and have our crack out."

They went into the pleasant garden of the Tuileries, and Urquhart, with an engineer's eye, selected a seat which he judged capable of sustaining his weight, and motioned to Arthur to take a place by his side.

"And now, my man, for confession and absolution, as yon dirty-looking priest that's thumbing the little mass book, and mumbling away there, would say. What's on your mind?"

"More than I can tell you, Robert; but I will tell you a good deal, nevertheless."

"But make a clean breast of it, Arthur. Even those doctors have the sense to tell you that you should hide nothing from your physician."

"I will hide nothing that I ought to tell."

"Well, well, we'll take what we can get quietly, and then wrangle for the rest—that's a bonny rule of life, my man."

"I have come to France, Robert, upon an errand of the most singular kind," said Arthur, who had been reduced by the prolonged struggle with himself to feel the necessity of making a confidence, and of receiving the support and counsel of a friend; but had resolved that, deeply tempted as he was to cast the whole burden of his sorrow before Urquhart, no word should convey to the latter a shadow of the gloomy doubts that were darkening his own existence, and menacing him with a future of loneliness and wretchedness.

"Political, perhaps, or official?" asked Urquhart. "That's the way business is managed now, instead of leaving it to those diplomatic fellows who take an acre of foolscap to tell their Government that they have called on a man and he was out of town."

"Neither—I wish it were—neither. It is solely, painfully private," replied Lygon.

Robert Urquhart addressed himself to listen intently.

"You took it for granted, yesterday, that Laura

must be with me," said Arthur, bringing out the name with an effort. "She is not with me, but I have followed her here."

"Well," returned Urquhart, cheerfully. "And what brought her?"

"I do not know—that is, I know in part."

The Scotsman knitted his large brow, and his countenance assumed a sudden sternness, utterly foreign to its usual character, and far from pleasant to behold.

"I must hear more," he said, "but I do not like the beginning."

In a few words Arthur related to him the story of the sudden departure of Mrs. Lygon, suppressing mention of the note that had been left on the table of the bed-room, but proceeding to speak of his own journey to consult Mr. Berry.

"And why did Berry send you to France?" was the expected and inevitable question.

For this demand Arthur Lygon had prepared himself, and seizing Bertha's hint of a political trouble in which Mr. Vernon had been involved, he transferred that suggestion to the counsel of the solicitor at Lipthwaite. Poor Bertha—could she but have known the care which the man whom she had deceived was taking to frame a reply that should exclude her name from question.

"I never heard of this plot, or whatever it was," said Robert Urquhart.

"Nor I," said Lygon, "but you are as well aware as I am that Mr. Vernon led a strange life before

he settled at Lipthwaite, and there is nothing unlikely in the story."

"Which, Arthur, you believe as much as I do. That is, you believe neither jot nor tittle of it."

"I wish to believe it."

"Wish to believe a lie. That is foolish talk, Arthur Lygon."

"Believing it, I am here," said Lygon.

"Cut this sort of thing short," said Robert Urquhart, almost sternly. "We are not to play with words, when there is honour or shame in the matter before us. You are either meaning to tell me nothing, in which case the sooner we two part company the better; or, which is more likely, you are preparing the way to tell me what you ought. You will take your choice, of course, but you call me your friend."

"You are impatient, Urquhart," said Lygon, with a forced composure. "You have not heard me to the end."

"I know that well," said Urquhart, quickly.

"I have told you why I came over to France. Naturally, the first place I hastened to was your house."

He expected an assent from his companion, but the latter preserved a dead silence.

"I saw Bertha," he continued, "and learned that my wife *had* been with her, but had returned to Paris, and was on her way to England."

"Which you believe to be as great a lie as the first story, or I could never have kept you in Paris

last night. You believe my wife to have told you a deliberate falsehood."

"I have said nothing of the kind, and I have given you no right to say anything of the kind," said Arthur, firmly.

"We shall see," said Urquhart. "I am waiting for the end that you have promised me."

"Bertha told me what she supposed to be true."

"And why do you suppose the contrary?"

"For reasons of my own, which in no way concern any one but myself and Laura."

"The first thing that we will do," said Urquhart, rising, "is to take the first train to Versailles, and hear from my wife's own lips all that she has to say upon this business."

"I have no intention of returning to Versailles. Robert, you profess yourself my friend, and as I believe, most truly mean to serve me. If so, you will do it in *my* way, or you will cause irreparable injury."

"You have mixed up my wife's name and fame in the affair," said Urquhart, "and therefore it becomes mine as much as yours. But you are quite right, Arthur, in believing that I would not move one hair's breadth in a line that could injure you, and if I spoke hastily, you must remember that I am a man of action, and out of the habit of picking my words. And now, Arthur, tell me the rest."

"The rest is that I do not believe Laura to be returning to England, and that I do believe her to be

in—France," he said, hesitating for a moment at the word.

"I said I never picked a word," said Robert Urquhart, "but I do not know what word to use now. Yet if we are to understand one another, I must run all chances of hurting you to the soul. You will not say why you think Bertha has been deceived. If you will not, I must ask you a frightful question."

"I foresee it," said Lygon, with a terrible calmness. "You would ask me whether I have reason to think——my God!" he said, grinding his teeth, "that the thought should have to be put into language!—well,—whether I have reason to think that Laura is not worth a husband's pursuing."

"Answer that."

"Reason? I thank God—I thank God from my very heart, No. But—"

"Nay, hold your tongue there," said the Scot, more kindly and gravely than he had spoken since their first meeting. "Be silent there. We may do wicked wrong, the wickedest, if we go a step further in that direction, when you are able to say the words you have just uttered. They mean that you know nothing against your wife, and that if she stood before you now, and I would to Heaven she did, you would not dare to make any charge against her. She is innocent, but there is a mystery to be cleared up. For God's sake let us do no injustice in our rash impatience that *we* cannot clear it."

Gravely he laid his hand upon the shoulder of his

friend, whose agitation visibly increased, and who did not reply.

"Do not think, Arthur," continued Urquhart, "that I am saying this to delude you into false hopes, or to beguile you with a temporary comfort. I would not do so, if the speaking my own convictions were to be followed by your falling down dead upon this ground. If I believed that your wife had forgotten her duty, I would be the first to urge you to drive her from your home, and tear her from your heart,—the first to scorn you if you forgot your duty to yourself. But out of your heart came the words that assured me of her innocence, and I now say to you, in all the sincerity which man can show to his fellow-man, hold your heart up, and keep the devil's thoughts out of it, and look into her dear eyes and hear her tell you why you have been thus tried. In the name of the God who will judge us all, Arthur Lygon, I call on you to do justice to the woman you chose from the world."

This appeal was made in a tone that was more than grave, it was solemn, and as is not uncommon with the educated Scotchman, when really and worthily excited, the language of Urquhart took somewhat of the manner of the preacher—a fact easily referable to the earlier life of the natives of a country where religious ordinances are so highly cherished as in Scotland. The effect upon Arthur Lygon was strong, but the habit of self-control, dear to the Englishman, prevented his giving way to any vehement demonstration of what he felt. He wrung Urquhart's hand

hard, and turned away to gain a more perfect victory over his emotions. Urquhart perceived this, and permitted Lygon to remain silent for some minutes. Then passing his arm through that of his friend, Robert Urquhart said, in the old pleasant voice,—

"We'll just take a turn. It quickens the brain to quicken the circulation."

And Arthur, yielding to the kindly impulse, walked by the side of Urquhart, and listened to his further counsel.

"*That* is settled," said Robert, and there was no need to explain the world of meaning in the simple word. "Now I am one of those who do nothing by halves. When I give my confidence, I give it wholly, and when I am deceived, I punish with my full power. If you will take my advice, Arthur, you will return to your home. In all likelihood you will find your wife there before you. But whether or not, it is upon your own hearthstone that you should be waiting her."

"It may be so," replied Lygon, sadly.

"It is so," replied Urquhart. "You have not told me the reasons why you think poor Bertha was deceived, nor do I care a rush to hear them, now that you have declared the rest. But if Laura is doing what is right, it matters little where she is. If your presence were necessary to her she would not have left you without a clue. Trust the wife of your bosom, the mother of your children, and go home, and wait for her where she has so often waited for you."

"I think," said Arthur, after a pause, "that your judgment is a safer guide to me than my own, in my present state of mind."

"That means that you will go."

"Yes."

"That is well. It is the first time I ever tried to send you away," said Urquhart, his hospitable instinct refusing, even under such circumstances, to be entirely silenced. "But you'll not misjudge me for that, my man."

"My dear Robert."

"Another word, though. I shall go home as soon as I have seen you off."

"Yes," said Arthur, anxiously.

"I see what you are thinking about. But don't I tell you that I never do things by halves? I regard all that you have said to me as mere idle talk, and certainly I should not think it worthy to be repeated to anybody, least of all to my own wife."

"But," said Arthur, "you will of course mention that I told you of Laura's visit to her sister?"

"If Laura has given Bertha her confidence, as I make no doubt she has," said Urquhart, "Bertha will tell me whatever it is meet and right I should know. But I shall ask her no questions, and I shall wait patiently for your letter to inform me of your being satisfied on every point, and I know you'll not let me wait for that any longer than is needful."

"Not an hour."

"There is one thing, Robert," said Arthur, who, gladly clinging to the resolute assurance of the Scot

in regard to the innocence of Laura, had thoughts for the weak and terrified woman at Versailles, whom he had so recently beheld in her agony of fear. What if Urquhart should, by some mistaken or half understood words, drive her into a sudden revelation.

"What is that, my man?"

"Why," said Arthur, resolved on preventing danger even to one who *had* given him but little cause to care for her welfare, "the fact is—and I ought to tell you—I was rather rude—at least I was abrupt in my manner to Bertha."

"We will make all allowance—nay, Arthur, you don't think so ill of her or of me as to think that when a man is half distracted about his wife, his looks and words are to be counted up against him by either of us as if he were a stage-player. For shame!"

"I own that expecting, hoping, to find Laura, and learning that she was gone, I allowed my feelings to manifest themselves—"

"If you say another word about it, I shall think that Bertha was less kind and considerate than it was her duty to be."

"No, you must not think that, but I fear she was perhaps hurt at my impatience."

"I will make her an ample apology for you, then."

"Do so, then."

"Or if you like to make it for yourself, though I am heartily angry with you for thinking it necessary, we'll just step back to the hotel, and you may write her a bit of a note."

"And I will," said Arthur, catching at the proposal, which he himself had been on the point of hazarding.

They returned to the house, and Arthur wrote as follows:

"My dear Bertha,

"I am leaving for England, but feel that I ought to say half a dozen words to you in apology for my hasty manner in leaving you. I have explained, however, to Robert, that having traced Laura to your house, and receiving from you the rough shock given by your information that she had gone off to England, I expressed myself somewhat unkindly, but though he assures me that you will overlook it, I cannot help making my personal request to you to do so. He does not think that I can be of any use in aiding anybody in the matter with which Mr. Vernon was said to have been connected, and therefore my remaining in Paris would be idle. I trust to find that Laura has not been over-fatigued by her hurried journey. So with renewed apology and *adieux*,

"Yours affectionately,

"*Paris.*" "Arthur Lygon.

"This is what I have written," said Lygon.

"You have written all that is right, I dare swear," said Urquhart. "I have too many letters of my own, and don't want to hear anybody else's. Seal it up, my man, and I will be your faithful postman."

This will surely be hint enough to her, poor wretch,

thought Lygon, as he enveloped the letter. If not, she must take her chance. I am in no mood for further precaution. "Here it is, Robert."

"It shall go, even if I do not return at once," said Urquhart. "And see, there is a train in an and I would have you depart by that. We have not met for many a day, my dear Arthur; and I little thought, when the time did come, that we would have had such a conversation; but who knows what will happen to any of us? But I hope that you will look back, many a happy day to come, upon our present trouble, and be thankful that we were brought out of it so completely. Go home, my man, and once more take the comfort with you that you have a good and loving wife, and that all this will pass away like a dream; and one day, when it's nearly forgotten, and the story comes up again to your mind, you'll just give Laura a kiss for her brother-in-law, and say that he upheld her in the hour when her good-for-nought husband permitted the devil, which is Satan, to get the upper hand of him. But you'll drive away the devil's thoughts now, Arthur, I've your promise for that?"

"You have."

"Your hand on it. And I'll see you to the train, my man. We'll have no discontented bodies like you upon this free and happy soil of France."

END OF VOL. I.

BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.